

15¢



44 Western

MAGAZINE

DEC.

**SHEEPERS
DIE FIRST!**
*A NOVEL BY
CLIFF BISBEE*

**GUN-
PRODIGAL'S
BULLET
FEAST**
*A NOVEL BY
WAYNE
D. OVERHOLSER*

**CHESHIRE·JONES
SHAFFER
CRUICKSHANK
AND OTHERS**





Spencerian OR *Sophisticated*

Whether you were taught to write in precise Spencerian...or picked up your own characteristic style of quick, clear letters formed by up-and-down strokes...the Inkograph is a pleasing pen.

THE 14 kt. solid gold ball-like point will trace delicate, deliberate lines...or race over paper smoothly, speedily as your thoughts and fingers fly...can't bend or spread under pressure, is strong enough to stand the stress of twists and twirls...writes easily as a lead pencil!

The Inkograph is always ready and right for every writer...suits any hand or any style of writing...writes smoothly on any kind of paper...makes clear carbon copies...does lettering without smudge...stands even a child's rough usage...is fully guaranteed.

Sold only at dealers, no mail orders. If not in stock, inquire again shortly...An Inkograph is worth waiting for!

To get the genuine, look for the name Inkograph stamped on clip and barrel.

INK-O-GRAPH \$2

Inkograph Co., Inc., 200 Hudson St., N. Y. C. 13



TERRY TRAPPED THE ALIEN SMUGGLERS AND THEN...

HURRYING TO REACH HER UNCLE'S CAMP ON LAKE HURON BEFORE DARK, BETTY ADAMS STUMBLES UPON MYSTERIOUS DOINGS IN WATKINS COVE



HERE'S YOUR CUT, CORBETT... THREE HUNDRED BUCKS. GUIDE 'EM TO TONY'S SHACK AND YOU'RE THROUGH

OKAY, LOUIE. ANOTHER LOAD TOMORROW NIGHT?

HANDS UP!

YOU CAN SEE WHY I HAD TO COVER YOUR MOUTH... ONE PEEP WOULD HAVE SPOILED OUR SHOW

GRACIOUS! AND THE "SIGNALER" IS YOUR MAN!

SENATOR CONGDON'S CAMP, MISS? WHY YOU'RE THREE MILES OUT OF YOUR WAY

COME BACK TO BORDER PATROL HEADQUARTERS AND I'LL DRIVE YOU OVER

DO YOU MIND IF I USE YOUR PHONE? UNCLE HARRY MAY BE WORRIED

GO RIGHT AHEAD. MEANWHILE, IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME, I'LL CLEAN UP

THIS BLADE'S A HONEY... THREE DAYS' WHISKERS GONE LIKE MAGIC!

THIN GILLETTES ARE PLENTY KEEN AND EASY SHAVING, TERRY

WHY, UNCLE, DO YOU KNOW MR. CORBETT?

KNOW HIM? WHY MAJOR CORBETT WAS MY BEST INTELLIGENCE OFFICER!

I'D BEEN PLANNING TO VISIT YOU AFTER I CRACKED THIS CASE, COLONEL... I MEAN SENATOR

YOU GET SMOOTH, REFRESHING SHAVES IN JIG-TIME WITH THIN GILLETTES. THEY'RE THE KEENEST, LONGEST-LASTING BLADES IN THE LOW-PRICE FIELD, AND BECAUSE THEY FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR ACCURATELY, YOUR FACE IS PROTECTED FROM THE SCRAPE AND IRRITATION OF MISFIT BLADES. USE THIN GILLETTES



15¢



.44 Western

MAGAZINE

ALL STORIES NEW

NO REPRINTS

Vol. 16

Contents for December, 1946

No. 2

GUN-PRODIGAL'S BULLET FEAST.....Wayne D. Overholser 10

A fine homecoming awaited Dan in Jawbone; his girl sold him out, his dad turned against him, and a hangnoose, sized to fit his neck, swung in the breeze! *A Novel*

LORD OF FANG AND CLAW.....Harold F. Cruickshank 32

Only one woman-creature held the friendship of mighty Osam, wolf-dog pack leader—yet she could not hold him from his fierce destiny! *Short Story*

TRAIL BLAZERS OF THE FRONTIER.....Cedric W. Windas 39

Harry Love—nemesis of notorious Joaquin Murieta! *Picture Feature*

SHOT IN THE DARK.....Gunnison Steele 40

"This is the first time I've let anybody see my money cache," said the old man. And Jed knew it would also be the last! *Short Story*

SHEEPERS DIE FIRST!.....Cliff M. Bisbee 44

Like the cork in a whiskey bottle, the powerful wheat baron plugged up the life-line of Burgess and Truax, sheepers-on-the-prod. But they aimed to break the bottleneck—and to hell with the consequences! *Novelette*

A NEW HAND FOR THE OWLHOOT.....Marvin J. Jones 62

Ahead of Ted Randall lay sanctuary—freedom . . . Behind him, the war-necked lawdog grimly ate up his trail! *Short Story*

OMAHA EDDIE GETS HOT.....W. F. Bragg 70

The Lone Wolf, jail-busting badman, was a fine insurance prospect, but he wanted his policy written in the blood of a pint-sized drummer! *Short Story*

BOSS OF DAMNATION DAM.....Giff Cheshire 78

Matt Quayle, two-fisted, trouble-shooting engineer, took his last, long-shot gamble in an effort to divert the iron horse—even though it might bring red ruin to the stricken town, and to himself! *Novelette*

WHEN BOOTHILL SENT A KILLER.....Robert Shaffer 6

The white-faced lunger was living on borrowed time—but he still stacked his greenhorn gun at 8-to-1 odds! *Fact Article*

NEXT ISSUE OUT NOVEMBER 20th!

Published monthly by Popular Publications, Inc., at 2256 Grove Street, Chicago, 16, Illinois. Editorial and Executive Offices, 205 East 42nd Street, New York, 17, N. Y. Henry Steeger, President and Secretary, Harold S. Goldsmith, Vice-President and Treasurer. Entered as second-class matter November 28, 1945, at the Post Office, at Chicago, Illinois, under the Act of March 3, 1879. Copyright, 1946, by Popular Publications, Inc. This issue is published simultaneously in the Dominion of Canada. Copyright under International Copyright Convention and Pan American Copyright Conventions. All rights reserved, including the right of reproduction, in whole or in part, in any form. Single copy, 15c. Annual subscription for U.S.A., its possessions and Canada, \$1.80; other countries 50c additional. Send subscriptions to 205 East 42nd Street, New York, 17, N. Y. For advertising rates, address Sam J. Perry, 205 East 42nd Street, New York, 17, N. Y. When submitting manuscripts, enclose stamped, self-addressed envelope for their return, if found unavailable. The publishers will exercise care in the handling of unsolicited manuscripts, but assume no responsibility for their return. Any resemblance between any character, appearing in fictional matter, and any person, living or dead, is entirely coincidental and unintentional. Printed in the U.S.A.



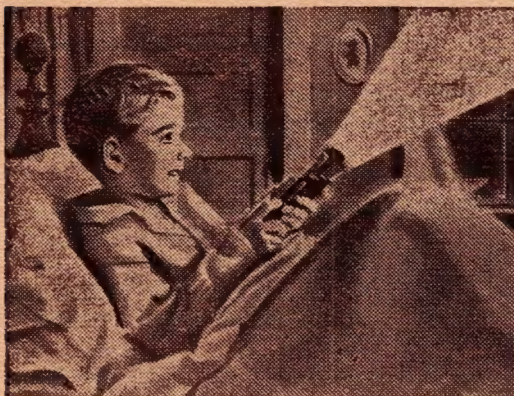
How to help your child fight **FEAR OF DARKNESS**

... as recommended in the interest of child welfare by Rose G. Anderson, Ph. D.,
Director of the Psychological Service Center of New York



1 Fear of the dark is founded on a dread of the unknown. Many a grown man feels his courage ebb with the daylight. And to a child, whose limited experience makes him even more fearful, the dark can be filled with terrors... unfounded fears.

2 Bring back the daylight world he knows, with your "Eveready" flashlight... show that the yard, or the basement, is the same familiar place by night as by day... that night-time sounds are made by simple things. Let him use your flashlight himself—



For

**EXTRA POWER,
EXTRA LIFE
—AT NO
EXTRA COST**

3 Encourage him to perform small tasks after dark, when he may use his "Eveready" flashlight, such as putting his toys away or getting something for you from a dark closet. Above all, never frighten him with "Bogeyman"; appeal to his pride. Then he will accept darkness.

FOR ANY flashlight use, rely on "Eveready" batteries. Their reputation for longer life of brighter light has made them the largest-selling flashlight batteries in the world—and *justly!* Ask your dealer for "Eveready" batteries by name; their extra light, extra life cost you *nothing* extra!

NATIONAL CARBON COMPANY, INC.
30 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y.
Unit of Union Carbide and Carbon Corporation



The registered trademark "Eveready" distinguishes products of National Carbon Company, Inc.

When Boothill Sent a Killer

By Robert Shaffer

★ **That white-faced young lunger was living on borrowed time—but Boothill wouldn't call for payment until eight tough Texas gunmen lay dead before the kid's smoking gun. . . .** ★

THEY still talk of that roaring night of hell in Newton town when guns belched red in the Tuttle Dance Hall and nine men died in battle, though few are left who remember it in detail.

Newton, in those days, was a wide-open, roaring trail-town, perhaps the wildest of them all. It was as if the town itself knew that its life as an end-of-steel cowtown metropolis would last little over a year, and it wanted to make up for its brief existence by living furiously. Over fifty men were buried the first year with their boots on in Boot-Foot Hill. Among the honkytonks of the part of town known jocularly as "Hide Park" were the Mint, the Side Track, the Alamo, the Bull's Head, the Legal Tender, the Red Front, and the Blue Front saloons, and Tuttle's Dance Hall.

Eastern buyers made deals for Texas beef with the drovers in the lobby of the Santa Fe Hotel, and paid in cold hard cash. Money was king in Newton, and cowhands thronged the streets, their spurs let out to the last notch, eager for a fight or a frolic, throwing their trail pay around like confetti in saloons and hell-spots along Main Street.

Mike McCluskie was gun-marshal of the town. Few people knew that McCluskie's real name was Art Delaney, wanted down on the Border for murder, but even if they had, it wouldn't have made much difference. Mike rodde the law in Newton, and his orders were to let the boys have their fun. At times, the Texas cowpokes got out of line and Mike had either to shoot it out with them, or settle the argument with his sledge-hard fists. There were many of those who came up the trail who were eager to take the marshal on. McCluskie's guns added considerably to the Boothill tally, but, killer though he was, McCluskie had a heart

almost as big as his big blustering body.

One day, a skinny, gangly kid of seventeen dropped off the West-bound freight at Newton. He was weak, run-down, ragged and hungry, and had a racking, tubercular cough. He gave his name as Jim Riley. Riley, it was easy to see, didn't have long to live. McCluskie took the kid in, fed him, clothed him, and he let him sleep in the jail. Some said Riley knew of McCluskie's past. Others maintained he was McCluskie's brother. And there was whispered gossip that young Riley was McCluskie's son by a dance-hall girl. No one knew for sure. But if anyone made fun of Riley, he had to answer to McCluskie. The kid worshipped the marshal. Wherever McCluskie was, the kid wasn't far away.

The night when McCluskie and a Texan named Bill Bailey got in an argument in the Red Front saloon, McCluskie beat Bailey up in the fist fight that followed. Bailey ran out into the street, yelling for McCluskie to come on and shoot it out.

McCluskie stepped outside, and when the gunsmoke lifted, Bailey lay dead in the dust. That same week McCluskie killed three more trail hands, and word went down the trail that Newton's marshal was making war on the Texiticans.

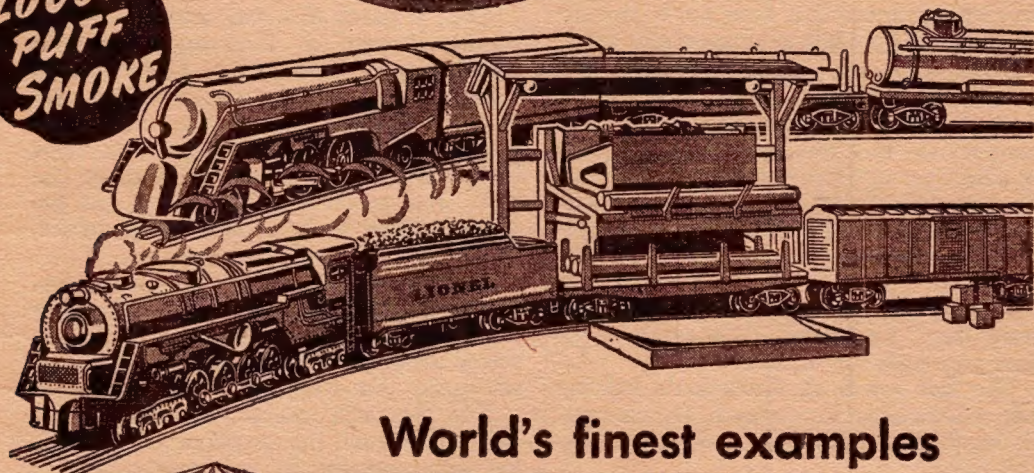
The next trail-herd to hit town was the Cross-J outfit, up from the Brazos, in charge of Hugh Anderson, son of Cliff Anderson, a prosperous Texas rancher. In the Cross J crew were Will Garret, Hank Kearnes, and Jim Wilkerson, who along with Anderson, had been Texas friends of Bailey's. When they heard of Bailey's death they loosened their guns in their holsters and went hunting themselves a marshal.

McCluskie had been out of town for the
(Continued on page 8)



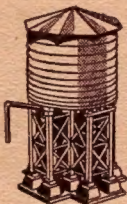
NO FUN LIKE
MODEL RAILROADING
WITH
LIONEL TRAINS!

**LOCOS
PUFF
SMOKE**



World's finest examples of scale detailing and realism

Brand new operating Water Tower — water lowers and rises in the tank. Remote control operation.



Triple-action magnet crane. Derrick revolves in complete circle. Remote control operation.

The new LIONEL locos, cars, and accessories for 1946 are the finest we have ever made. Locos feature SMOKE! All rolling stock equipped with remote control electro magnetic real R.R. knuckle couplers and solid steel wheels. Read about all the new features in the catalog.

READ ABOUT
THE NEW
**ELECTRONIC
CONTROL**
EXCLUSIVE WITH
LIONEL

*For the complete
story send for
catalog*



— also included is book on Scenery Building, and our secret "Pop Persuader".

THE LIONEL CORPORATION, Dept. L
15 East 26 St., New York (10), N. Y.

Please send the full color catalog and Scenery Construction Book — also secret "Pop Persuader". (I enclose 10c for mailing.)

Name

Address

City Zone State

(Please don't forget 10c for mailing charges)

(Continued from page 6)

day, and when he returned he strode into the Tuttle Dance Hall. There the bartender warned him that Anderson and his crowd of Texans were on the look-out for him. McCluskie nodded his thanks to the bar-keep and then lounged over and sat down to watch a game at the rear of the room. Shortly afterward, Anderson and half his trail crew filed through the doors and lined up with their backs to the bar watching McCluskie. A sudden stark silence replaced the roar of the room, an oppressive, danger-freighted stillness that men knew instinctively was the prelude to violence and death.

Hugh Anderson took the initiative. He strode toward McCluskie, one hand behind his back. Watching him, McCluskie must have known that this was showdown, but he didn't get up from his chair. Anderson, his face was flushed from liquor and tension building up within him, strode to within a few yards of McCluskie before he stopped.

"Get up on yore legs, you damned murderin' dog!" he snarled. "Get up, so I can blast yore guts full of lead!"

The last words of Anderson's fighting talk ended almost in a screech. He whipped his hand from behind his back and it was Colt-filled.

McCluskie had kicked back his chair and was getting to his feet when the first slugs from Anderson's gun caught him through the chest. He folded forward to the floor, his own guns untouched.

The Texans crowded up close around the fallen marshal. Anderson stood over him, his smoking gun still in his hand. There were no sounds save the rasping of McCluskie's labored breath as he lay dying. Then a door slammed in the silence. There was the click of a key turning in a lock, and Anderson and the Texans whirled. Jim

Riley stood there against the door, his wasted body crouched and a madman's light in his pale eyes. His skinny, clawlike hand dug inside his tattered shirt and dragged out a six-shooter. . . .

Hell broke loose inside that room then. Red, roaring hell, with guns lancing streamers of flame across the half-light, and the cries of men dying, as slugs ripped into their bodies. Kerosene lamps flickered and rocked out from the gun blasts, plunging the place in darkness. And suddenly, once more, all was quiet. . . .

Then a match flickered, and one by one the lamps were lit. Counting McCluskie, nine bodies lay on the floor. Anderson was wounded. Jim Wilkerson was dying, and so were Kearnes and Garret. Two cowboys lay dead in front of the bar. Two more lifeless bodies were huddled against the wall. But nowhere in the room was the wasted, slight body of the young invalid, Jim Riley.

No one had seen him leave the room. The door was still locked. To this day, how Jim Riley got out of that room is an unsolved mystery. He was never seen in Newton again. Jim Riley had simply vanished.

Yes, they still talk of that bloody gunfight in Newton, though there aren't many left who remember it. Yet when old-timers get together, sitting on park benches on the lawn under the beautiful elms around the city hall, spinning windies about the hell-roaring days of the trail and of Newton's birth, they always get around to that famous fight in Tuttle's Dance Hall, when the blood of fighting men ran red, and men died to the roar of six-shooters.

And always the unanswerable question comes up: What happened to the loyal little invalid who fought that desperate odds-on battle for the one man he could call friend?





Building this
A. M. SIGNAL GENERATOR
gives you valuable experience.
Provides amplitude-modulated
signals for test and experiment
purpose.

RADIO SERVICING pays good money for
full time work. Many others make \$5, \$10
a week **EXTRA** fixing Radios in spare
time.



Learn RADIO by PRACTICING in Spare Time

with 6 Big Kits of Radio Parts I Send You



Do you want a good-pay job in Radio—or your own money-making Radio Shop? Mail Coupon for a **FREE** Sample Lesson and my **FREE** 64-page book, "Win Rich Rewards in Radio." See how N.R.I. gives you practical Radio experience at home—building, testing, repairing Radios with 6 **BIG KITS** OF PARTS I send!

**Many Beginners Soon Make Good Extra Money
In Spare Time While Learning**

The day you enroll I start sending **EXTRA MONEY JOB SHEETS**. You **LEARN** Radio principles from my easy-to-grasp, illustrated lessons—**PRACTICE** what you learn with parts I send—**USE** your knowledge to make **EXTRA** money fixing neighbors' Radios in spare time while still learning! From here it's a short step to your own full-time Radio Shop or a good Radio job!

**Future for Trained Men Is Bright
in Radio, Television, Electronics**

It's probably easier to get started in Radio now than ever before because the Radio Repair business is booming. Trained Radio Technicians also find profitable opportunities in Police, Aviation, Marine Radio, Broadcasting, Radio Manufacturing, Public Address work. Think of even greater opportunities as Television and Electronics become available to the public! Send for free books now!

Find Out What N.R.I. Can Do for You

Mail Coupon for Sample Lesson and my 64-page book. Read the details about my Course. Read letters from men I trained, telling what they are doing, earning. See how quickly, easily you can get started. No obligation! Just **MAIL COUPON** NOW in an envelope or paste it on a penny postal. **J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 6NS9, National Radio Institute, Pioneer Home Study Radio School, Washington 9, D. C.**

**My Course Includes Training in
TELEVISION • ELECTRONICS**

You Build This
MEASURING INSTRUMENT
yourself early in the course—use it for
practical Radio work on neighborhood
Radios to pick up **EXTRA** spare time
money!

You Build This
**SUPERHETERODYNE
CIRCUIT** that brings in local and
distant stations. You get practical
experience putting this set
through fascinating tests!

BE A SUCCESS in RADIO
I Will Train You at Home

Sample Lesson FREE



Gives hints on Receiver Servicing, Locating Defects, Repair of Loudspeaker, I. F. Transformer, Gang Tuner, Condenser, etc., 31 illustrations. Study it—keep it—use it—without obligation! Mail Coupon NOW for your copy!



**GET BOTH 64 PAGE BOOK • FREE
SAMPLE LESSON**

Mr. J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 6NS9,
National Radio Institute, Washington 9, D. C.
Mail me **FREE**, without obligation, Sample Lesson
and 64-page book about how to win success in
Radio and Television—Electronics. (No salesman
will call. Please write plainly.)
Name..... Age.....
Address.....
City..... State.....
(Please include Post Office zone number)



Approved for Training under GI Bill



Snaking his .30-30 from the boot Dan took careful aim at the ambusher.

CHAPTER ONE

Return

DAN GALT broke camp at dawn and left the pine-fringed foothills of the Blue Mountains, following the long sage slopes into Hornet valley. He rode into Jawbone near noon, a long-armed narrow-hipped man whose great shoulders and pinched-middle appearance marked him as one who spent few waking hours out of the saddle. Another mark was upon him, too: the bone-handled guns carried low on his hips, both corded tightly against his thighs. Dan Galt, gunslinger, was returning home.

It wasn't much of a town, this Jawbone: a store, two saloons, one hotel, a scattering of small shops and dwellings, and the paintless courthouse at the end of the block, a dirty-windowed, weather-battered building that bore mute testimony to the minuscule respect the Hornet county folks held for that strange intangible known as law. There had been no change in Jawbone in the three years Dan had been gone.

Swinging down in front of the Powderhorn Saloon, Dan racked his black, and stood for a moment staring across the street

A fine homecoming awaited Dan when he rode into Jawbone . . . where his girl had sold him out for a gunslick shyder, his rancher dad turned against him, and a hungry hangnoose, sized to fit his neck, was swinging from a convenient cottonwood.



GUN-PRODIGAL'S BULLET FEAST

Action-Packed Frontier Novel

By Wayne D. Overholser



at the Buckjack. It had always been the saloon favored by the Box B buckaroos the same as the Powderhorn had been favored by Hatchet, old Rocky Galt's spread. Dan was not surprised, this being Saturday, that there would be a string of Box B mounts tied in front of the Buckjack, another line of Hatchet horses in front of the Powderhorn. What did surprise him was the absolute quiet about the place, which was something of a miracle for a day when the Box B and Hatchet boys hit town together.

"Dan, you old hoss thief, come in here and wet your whistle."

Dan wheeled, saw Bugeye Lowrie looking over the batwings, a wide grin splitting his whisky face. Dan strode quickly to him and gripped his hand. "It's good to see you, Bugeye," Dan said soberly. Looking back across the years that had held more than their share of suppression and bitterness, he saw gabby old Bugeye as the one friend whose constancy he could not doubt.

Bugeye turned, suddenly finding something in his eye that needed rubbing. He called, "Come on in, son. Have a drink."

The Powderhorn was deserted except for Bugeye and the barkeep. Dan, staring into the cool gloom, wondered at it and even inquired about it. The barman clucked and opened his mouth only to close it when Bugeye shot him a warning glance.

"Having a trial," Bugeye said carefully. "Everybody's down to the courthouse."

"Some trial to pull both Hatchet and Box B into town," Dan said.

"Yeah, some trial." Buckeye cast a speculative glance down Dan's long body, and came back up to his legs to rest on the thonged-down guns. "They got a new law here in Jawbone, Dan. Says you can't pack no iron when you're in town. Got to hand 'em over to the barkeep here or in the Buckjack."

"To hell with 'em," Dan snapped truculently. "I don't give my gun to nobody."

"You'll have trouble with the sheriff." Bugeye scratched a wart on his cheek. "New man name of Lamson. Tough hand. He won't like it, Dan."

Dan shrugged and let it go. In the three years since he'd left Hornet valley, he'd run afoul of more than one tough sheriff, but none had ever taken his guns. "What's the trial about?"

"Lawsuit over the drained-off land around Hornet Lake," Bugeye said, pouring another drink.

"Hell, there's no drained-off land around the lake."

"There is now. Ten thousand acres, which same will make the best hay land in the county. Your dad's had his side of it drained and he's cleaned out the tules. Now Mel Breen allows it's his, and he threw a bunch of tough hands in there to hold it. Rock was fit to be tied."

"He came into court about it?" Dan demanded.

"Yep. Rocky ain't changed none, son. Keeps backing up in front of Breen like he always has. Said he'd argue it out in front of Judge Kershaw."

Dan wheeled away from the bar and had reached the batwings before Bugeye called, "Hey, what's biting you?"

"I'm going to see what this trial is all about."

"You'll just kick up some hell. Stay away. Ride on out to the ranch."

"Dad sent for me. This must have been the reason."

There was a new and unexpected turbulence in Dan Galt's mind as he walked the block and a half to the courthouse. He thought of Peggy Breen whom he had loved; of her father, Mel Breen, who hated the Galts and who had no faith in anything but a quirt and a sixgun, and of his own father who had steadfastly held to a vague ideal about law and who had prevented a range war only because he had taken Breen's insults and had not struck back. Then Dan was in the courthouse and looking along the hall through the open door into the courtroom.

MEL BREEN was in the witness chair, his fat sides oozing over the edges. "I'm just standing on my riparian rights, Judge," Breen was saying loudly. "You'd know that new land was all mine if you knew the difference between a cook book and a law book."

Judge Kershaw pounded his desk with the butt of his gun. "Ten dollars fine for contempt of court."

With a grand flourish Mel Breen pulled a gold eagle out of his pocket and threw it at the judge. "Like I was saying, what's left of Hornet Lake is inside my range."

Hatchet range don't touch it, so that ten thousand acres of swamp land is mine. I'm gonna seed it come spring and I'm gonna cut the hay. Don't make me no never mind that an old fool like Rocky Galt goes ahead and . . ."

Little Curt Armin, Rocky Galt's lawyer, whirled to face the judge. "Your honor, isn't it time you stopped this farce? Breen's refused to answer any questions we've asked him."

Judge Kershaw cleared his throat. He cast a quick glance at Jake Strong, Breen's lawyer, then at Mel Breen himself, his faded eyes showing the fear he had of the big cattleman. He was a long-necked man whose face looked much like an apple that had survived a long winter in the cellar. Now he ran a finger along one of his cheek wrinkles and cleared his throat again.

"Mel, maybe you ought to quit telling the court what you're going to do and answer the question you were asked about the sand reef going out."

Breen pulled himself to his feet, his gaze scornful. "I ain't answering no questions, Judge, to no banty like Armin there. I'm wasting my time here. I'm standing on my riparian rights, and that's the end of it."

"Make him sit down," Armin cried to the judge. "I'm not done."

"He's done all right," Breen said contemptuously. "So's Rocky Galt. I ran him out of California, and by hell, I'll run him out of Oregon."

It was probably, Dan thought, the first time Breen had ever been brought into court for anything, and he was taking this way to show what he thought of Hornet county law. From where he stood in the shadowed gloom of the hall, Dan could see the back of Peggy Breen's red head, his father's shiny bald spot; he could see the perfect profile of Jake Strong's face.

He had been uncertain of himself through all the weeks it had taken him to ride from Arizona to Oregon, constantly questioning his wisdom in coming back. He and his father had parted in anger and he was surprised to receive the request to return. Now his uncertainty was gone. He knew exactly what he was going to do.

Dan came through the door, and when Breen had almost reached his chair in front of the railing, Dan called, "Just why did that sand reef go out, Breen?"

Breen stopped, flat-footed, and stared at Dan. Every other head in the room except Judge Kershaw's snapped around and a silence settled upon the crowd that was almost breathless in its intensity, silence broken only by the steady droning of a blow fly against a dirty window. Then Breen snarled, "To hell with you, Galt. We've heard about you and what you've done since you left Hornet valley, but you don't scare us none."

A big man in front of the room lumbered to his feet. "Get them guns off," he snapped, "and shut up. You can't bust into Judge Kershaw's court and pop off that-away."

Dan laughed. "When did Judge Kershaw start having rules about the way he runs his court? And if he has got rules, why don't you see that Breen stays in the witness chair till he answers Armin's questions?"

"Get out of the courtroom," the big man said thickly. He jerked a thumb to the star on his chest. "I'm the sheriff in case you ain't guessed. Turn your irons in at the Buckjack or the Powderhorn, and then come back here and address the court proper like if you've got anything to say pertaining to the business of this here court."

Dan cocked his Stetson back so that it rode his head at a combative angle. "Come and get 'em, sheriff," he invited.

Judge Kershaw pounded his desk with the butt of his gun. "Court's recessed till two o'clock this afternoon," he squalled.

THE crowd started for the door, but by some miracle Peggy Breen reached Dan first. She pushed him through the door, and gripping his hand, pulled him at a run along the hall and into the street. "Come on," she urged. "You're bent on undoing in five minutes everything that I've done in three years."

He didn't understand what she was saying, but when they were out of the courthouse and into the street he stopped and pulling her around to him, stared into her face. It hadn't changed. She had been seventeen when he'd left. Now, at twenty, she was the same except that her body had filled out into the graceful curves of womanhood. Her eyes were a darker blue than he had remembered, her hair even more fiery

red. A few more freckles on her nose if such a thing was possible. But she was the same Peggy Breen he had loved three years ago. Then he saw the diamond on her left hand, and breath made an audible sound as it came out of him.

"Come on," Peggy repeated. "You're going to make nothing but trouble if you stand here."

"I guess I'm a fool for even dreaming," he said heavily, oblivious of the crowd that began eddying around them. "Who's ring is that?"

"Jake Strong's if it's any of your business," she snapped. "Can't you see what you've done, Dan, coming into the courtroom with your guns?"

"What I've done?" Dan laughed. "Looks like your dad was making quite a mess of the Judge's court."

"It's the first time he's ever been in court with your father. Always before he's hired another gun hand or put more of his crew to riding the boundary fence. The valley's growing up. We're thinking about law now and not how fast a man can pull a gun."

"Sounds like you've been listening to some of Dad's preaching," Dan murmured.

"Perhaps I have. Now will you get out of town and stay out until the trial's over?"

"It's over today as far as your father's concerned," Dan said dryly.

"I can handle him. Dan, get out before you kick everything to pieces."

"I'm not going," he said stubbornly.

"You fool," she cried. "You clumsy fool."

His grin was a quick, bold challenge. "Maybe not such a fool." He drew her to him and holding her firmly with his right arm, tilted her face up to his with his left and kissed her. She twisted and beat at him with her fists and kicked him on the shins, but he held her until somebody tittered. He let her go then, eyes searching the crowd for the man who had laughed.

She slapped him, hard across a tanned cheek and her voice was edged with scorn when she said, "You are a fool, Dan Galt, or you never would have come back."

"You can't hit a man like that hard enough to hurt him, Peggy. Stand back. Let me alone, Sheriff. I'll handle him."

It was Jake Strong who had come to stand beside Peggy. He had arrived in

Hornet valley not long before Dan had left. Dan had not known him well, but he knew he didn't like the lawyer. The man was too handsome, always too well dressed, his black eyes too bold and arrogant.

Dan's grin had not left his face. He stepped toward Strong as he said, "So you'll hit me hard enough to hurt me, will you, Jake?"

Strong drove at Dan, fists swinging, his moves quick and confident. Then Dan's left caught him on the side of the head and turned him half around. Strong cursed and came at Dan again only to be set back on his heels with another pile-driving punch. Dan laughed aloud. He said, "What ever gave you the idea you could fight, Jake?" He set to work then, forcing Strong back into the crowd that gave before them and battered him into the dust with a rain of rights and lefts.

Looking down at the fallen lawyer whose finery was not so fine now, at his dirty, bloody face, Dan laughed and motioned to Peggy. "He'd better keep his fighting inside a courtroom," he said, and turned quickly away so that no one would see the hurt that was in him. He was thinking of the last time he'd kissed Peggy before he'd left, and her whispered words, "I'll be waiting to go with you when you come back."

Dan walked quickly toward the Powderhorn, pretending not to see the Hatchet buckaroos who stood watching. When he was inside, he took two quick drinks, and said to Bugeye Lowrie. "What in hell has got into this valley?"

"You sure raised Cain," the old man said sourly. "I told you to stay away from that trial."

"I asked you what's got into the valley?"

"Nothing no more than what's always been here, along with growing pains that any cow country gets when law catches up with a man like Breen."

Outside, the crowd had broken up, Box B men drifting into the Buckjack, Hatchet men lining along the bar in the Powderhorn. Jake Strong was on his feet, still a little groggy, and walking toward the hotel. Peggy had disappeared. Dan, staring down at his filled whiskey glass, grinned a little as he thought of the sourness that would be in Jake Strong. No man liked to take a licking, least of all in front of the girl

who wore his diamond engagement ring.

Then Rocky Galt came into the Powderhorn, the sheriff beside him. Dan had never known for sure why his father had left California, although he had heard Mel Breen make the same brag he had made in the courtroom, that he'd run Rocky Galt out of California. Those years had been a closed book as far as Rocky was concerned. Dan only knew he was a small, motherless boy when they'd come north with a thousand head of young stuff, a band of buckaroos, and their household goods in wagons. They'd settled east of the rim above Hornet Lake and for a time Hornet valley had been Hatchet range.

Then Breen had come, and from that day until this Hatchet had been gradually falling back. Now the settlers were coming into the valley, taking first the broken country along the foothills of the Blue Mountains. That was gone now, and the new ones were drifting south and squatting on Hatchet range. Dan, staring at his father's thin, blue-veined face, knew he wouldn't fight homesteaders any more than he had fought Mel Breen.

Rocky Galt poured himself a drink and let it stand. He motioned to the sheriff. "Dan, meet Frank Lamson."

Dan nodded, a small smile striking at the corners of his mouth. "Howdy, Lamson. Guess we met in a sort of way."

Lamson's answering nod was cold. "In a sort of way. That still goes about wearing your guns in town."

"You coming after 'em?" Dan asked softly.

"Not just now," Lamson answered. "There's plenty of dynamite waiting to go off today without me adding to it, but your packing your irons don't help."

"That's why we came in," Rocky Galt said. "Ever since you pulled out, me and the judge and Peggy and a few more have been working to get something like law set up in this county. We sent to Nevada for Frank here to tote the star, and he's done purty well. He even got Breen to tell his men not to buck the gun-packing rule, which same is the nearest he ever came to recognizing law. Now we've got him into court to settle something that three years ago he'd have settled with guns." Galt paused, faded eyes on Dan. "I'm asking you to take off them irons."

ROCKY GALT was, for this country in which he had lived for twenty years, a strangely futile man. Too, it was a queer thing for him to have fathered a boy with the wild streak Dan Galt had had from birth. He had tried for more than twenty years to force Dan into the narrow confines of his own strict way of life; he had tried to break Dan and had used a quirt to do it. If he had succeeded, he would have loved Dan, but having failed, he did not understand the boy and the bitterness of failure had grown into a feeling close to hatred.

The final break had been over a gun fight in Jawbone in which Dan had killed a Box B buckaroo. Not once during the three years Dan had been gone had he heard from his father until he received the note asking him to return. Now Rocky Galt had come in from the street and greeted him as casually as if they had parted only that morning.

It was the same old contention; there was no use in going over it again. Dan shook his head, watching his father pull at his scrawny chin beard, and asked, "Why did you send for me if you didn't aim to make a fight out of it?"

"Send for you?" Rocky Galt looked blank. "I never sent for you. I told you when you left three years ago that I never wanted to see you again. I still don't. You made trouble when you were here. You made trouble the minute you hit town today." Galt shook his head. "Stay here twenty-four hours and you'll have a shooting war started. You don't fit here. Take off your guns if you're fixing to stay. Or move on."

Frank Lamson's meaty lips were tightly pressed. Bugeye Lowrie had called it right—Lamson was tough. Just as tough as Dan Galt would ever be, but he was smart, and he'd decided to wait for time to do the job on Dan that he would find hard to do now. So he held his silence, and Dan, reading the man, found amusement in it. His father had always called him tough and a trouble maker, but they'd sent out of the state for a lawman to do the same job he'd done in Arizona towns that were no tougher than Jawbone.

"What are you grinning at?" Rocky demanded.

"A joke I happened to think of." He looked at Lamson, and knew they under-

stood what was in each other's minds.

"Don't come out to Hatchet," Rocky Galt said sharply, "if you're staying around. You ain't welcome."

If Dan and Rocky lived to be a million years old, they'd never understand each other. That knowledge had been in Dan when he'd left Oregon three years ago. It had been in him when he started back. It had kept him awake at night while he stared at the stars and felt uncertainty grow and wondered why Rocky Galt had sent for him. There had been a hope that Rocky had changed, a small hope that hadn't panned out. Dan Galt grinned easily. He grinned now, a sour grin that was a mask. For all of his wildness, he had envied those who had a normal home. Even the kids who lived on the ten-cow spreads north of Jawbone had had a better childhood than he.

It was over now. All done. Washed out. Might as well ride on. Then he saw Bugeye Lowrie watching him with anxious, friendly eyes. He thought of Jake Strong, of bullying Mel Breen, and then of Peggy Breen, and his thoughts lingered momentarily there. He knew he wouldn't go on. Not yet. He said, "I think I'll stay to see the fun." He grinned at Lamson. "There ought to be some fun if the court rules against Breen and you try putting him off the lake land. Might be you'll need another man who can handle a gun."

"You won't have your guns then," Lamson said soberly, and turning, walked out with Rocky Galt.

CHAPTER TWO

Gun Flame in Court

DAN had dinner with Bugeye Lowrie in the Top Notch Cafe, and when they had finished eating they stood for a time under the wooden awning, smoking and watching the drift of the crowd toward the courthouse. He saw his father with Sheriff Lamson, the Hatchet crew trailing behind, and Bugeye growled into his beard. "Rocky's either gonna fight this time, or he'll lose his crew. Them boys have had about all of his crawling they can stomach."

A moment later Mel Breen went by, wiping his face with his bandanna as he cast a surreptitious glance at Dan and went on, his hard-bitten little ramrod, Les Wade

keeping step with him. Wade nodded at Dan, and his tone was friendly when he said, "Howdy, Galt. Glad to see you back."

Dan, surprised, said, "Thanks, Les." When Breen and Wade had gone on, Dan asked, "How do you figure that, Bugeye? Les was right proddy the day I had the gun ruckus and plugged one of his hands."

"Don't trust nobody," Bugeye said darkly. "Not nobody."

Judge Kershaw came hurrying along the walk, saw Dan, and came to him. He asked directly, "You staying in town?"

"For a spell."

Kershaw cleared his throat. He glanced toward the courthouse and brought his eyes back to Dan. Then he said a surprising thing. "Dan, this has built up for a long time. Men like your dad and Mel Breen don't keep hating each other for twenty years and then settle it in court. Not in this country." He cleared his throat again. "The lake draining off just brought things to a head. Rocky's got to fight or pull stakes. What are you going to do?"

"He don't want me around," Dan said sourly.

"You and Peggy are all right," Kershaw went on. "Not much sense of you two getting hurt because of your fathers. Rocky figures he's got the law on his side, and Mel thinks he's too big for the law." He rubbed a hand over his wrinkled face, a weary gesture of a tired old man. "Actually both of them are falling into some scheme they don't even know about. Dan, I'll feel better knowing you're around and that I can depend on you when our so-called law breaks down."

Puzzled, Dan asked, "What are you driving at?"

"Just stay out of this until it comes into the open. Then I'll send for you." Kershaw wheeled, and went on along the walk.

"That's the first welcome I've received," Dan said, "outside of you."

"Politics," Bugeye grumbled. "When you don't have law, you have some big hardcase throwing his weight around like a bull on the prod. Then you get law, and you've got politicians trying to scheme each other out of their shirts."

"What's back of it?" Dan demanded.

"Dunno." Bugeye shrugged. "Just don't trust nobody. That's all."

Jake Strong came along the boardwalk

clad in another suit and a clean shirt. Peggy left the hotel and went on with Strong.

"Kershaw said the lake draining off brought this to a head," Dan murmured thoughtfully. "What did he mean?"

"Breen's always been picking at little stuff, like rustling a few Hatchet steers or cutting fence or dusting off a Hatchet buckaroo with a slug from the rimrock. This time he's moved in on something big." Bugeye saw that Dan didn't understand, so he went on, "Rocky's been feeding a little more every winter on account of his grass ain't good like it was when he first came here. He's been buying hay from the nesters north of town 'cause he don't have much hay land, but that's expensive and a long haul. Then the lake drained off and let that swamp come up for air. It's naturally good hay land. He's got to have it, Dan."

"When I left," Dan said thoughtfully, "water came almost up to the bottom of the rim. Now why, after maybe a million years, would the lake drain down to a quarter size, and leave all that land bare?"

"The sand reef where Hornet Creek leaves the lake went out. That's all there is to it."

"Why would the sand reef go out?" Dan demanded doggedly.

Bugeye gave him a straight look. "I ain't saying, son, but like you said, it's been there a million years."

"Then somebody blew it out, wanting that land to show?"

"Folks ain't talking," Bugeye said evasively.

"I'm going to court," Dan said, and wheeled away.

Curt Armin was on his feet addressing Judge Kershaw when Dan took a chair in the back of the courtroom. "In representing Rocky Galt," Armin was saying, "I am only asking for justice in a land that has long been dominated by a selfish and greedy man." He paused, and then added boldly, "I mean Mel Breen."

"Objection," Jake Strong howled. He was on his feet and shaking his fist at Armin. "You can't say that about my client. Throw him out, Judge. Bar him from Hornet county court."

Kershaw pounded the desk with his gun butt. He threw a glance at Dan, and then brought his gaze to Strong. He said clearly and with more boldness than he had shown

during the morning session, "It's true, isn't it, Strong?"

"That isn't the point . . ." Strong began.

"Sit down," Breen said calmly. "Sure it's true. Let the banty talk."

"There is a principle at stake here," Armin went on, "which I want to state clearly. That principle is human justice. The question involved is whether or not Mel Breen shall continue, through force or threat of force, to dominate the legal actions of this county, or shall such questions as this suit be settled fairly in an unprejudiced court of law."

Armin motioned toward Breen. "There was some talk about riparian right this morning. Mel Breen and his attorney take the position that Breen, as riparian owner, has claim to not just the western portion of the old lake bed, but to the entire area made available for agriculture by the recession of the lake. I have never heard in a court of law a more presumptuous claim."

Armin turned to face Strong. "As any lawyer knows, the principles of riparian right go back to the English common law. It holds that the property of residents along a stream or body of water is not grounded by the survey line at the shore, but extends to the water's edge. Not to the north-south boundary fence which has been extended across the lake bed, but to the edge of the water as it is now."

He swung back to the judge. "Your honor, we shall immediately file suit on those grounds to force Breen to rebuild his fence so that Hatchet has access to the water of Hornet Lake. Therefore, the land now in question, lying between the rim and the present shore of Hornet Lake belongs to my client, Rocky Galt."

Breen laughed, loudly and contemptuously. "Go ahead and sue and be damned. My men are on the land you claim. What are you going to do about that, Galt?"

ROCKY GALT kept his seat and said nothing, his eyes on the judge. There was a moment of silence, and suddenly Dan was aware of the tension that had built up within the moment. Everybody was looking at Kershaw, expecting him to say something, to do something. The fate of the valley in this moment had been placed in his hands. He cleared his throat. "Breen, do I understand you to say you

will keep your armed men in the western section of the lake bed regardless of the decision of this court?"

"That's exactly what I'm saying," Breen said defiantly, "and I'd like to see you or any of your court orders get me out of there."

Kershaw cleared his throat again, eyes flicking momentarily to Dan as if to gain courage from the set of Dan Galt's craggy face. "Curt Armin has stated the principle of riparian right, which you knew," he nodded at Jake Strong. "Before this court passes judgment, is there anything you have to say, Galt?"

"Yes." Rocky Galt came to his feet, a claw-like hand coming to pull at his sketchy beard. "My lawyer got no satisfaction from Breen concerning the breaking of the sand reef. I believe he blew the reef out for the purpose of draining the lake and making this land available for farming. He should be arrested and held for trial."

"Your belief is hardly evidence," Kershaw said mildly. "Bring your evidence, if you have any, before the grand jury. Or," he motioned toward Jake Strong, "consult with the district attorney."

Galt laughed sourly. "I don't think Breen's lawyer, serving as district attorney, would do anything. You'll have to do it, Judge Kershaw, if justice is done."

Mel Breen lifted his great body erect, and for the first time within Dan's memory Breen and Rocky Galt stood face to face. Breen was mockingly triumphant, Galt sour and frustrated and futilely hating the big man who stood before him.

"We've had our little show, Rocky," Breen said with wicked malice. "You were never man enough to settle things between us. You want the court on your side. You want that tough star totter to side you. You want public opinion backing you. It's not enough to beat me, Rocky."

"This county's growing up," Galt said defiantly. "You can't go on forever blocking justice and making your own law."

Kershaw picked up his gun to pound for order, and then, thinking better of it, laid it down. Breen said, quite slowly, "It's been a long time, Rocky. You're no more man than you ever were. A man who will shoot a woman . . ."

A shrill, strangled cry came out of Rocky Galt, a cry more animal-like than human.

A skinny hand darted into his coat and came out with a derringer. Breen's laugh boomed across the courtroom as he drew a Colt from inside his coat. Then Dan was in the aisle, both guns in his hands. One blazed, the slug ripping Breen's right wrist, making him drop his gun and bringing a bellowed curse from him.

"Drop it," Dan yelled at his father.

Gaunt Rocky Galt stood motionless, the derringer half-raised, eyes on Dan, hating him and fearing him. Then he dropped the derringer, and sank into his seat. He began to cry, stooped shoulders shaking, great sobs coming from him that could have been heard in the street. Strangely enough, it was Peggy Breen who came along the aisle and, putting an arm around him, began talking to him.

Dan had never seen his father cry. He had never seen any man cry as Rocky Galt was crying now, here in front of the crowded court-room. Whatever prestige or dignity he had been able to hold through the years was gone. These saw him as Dan was seeing him now: weak, inept, and hating with futile bitterness. Too, Dan was thinking as were all the others about Breen's words: "*A man who will shoot a woman . . .*"

Doc Hunter came along the aisle and moved past Dan to where Breen stood cursing by the wall. Dan, in that moment, was struck by something he had not thought about before. He called sharply, "Lamson, you were sitting beside Dad. Why didn't you stop him?"

Lamson's grin was quick and mocking. "I'm just too slow, Galt."

The man was lying. It seemed to Dan as if these people, long watching the festering sore of hatred between the two cowmen, had wilfully allowed this to build up and had stood idly by. Handsome Jake Strong had sat beside Breen, but he had made no effort to stop him. Dan, turning to stare at Strong, saw that the lawyer, like Lamson, was smiling in an insulting, mocking way. One eye was closed, his face was dark with bruises, but Jake Strong felt secure and triumphant as he returned Dan's cold stare. Even little Curt Armin who had been Rocky Galt's lawyer for years seemed unaffected by this swift flow of drama.

Dan, standing there in the aisle, looked

at Judge Kershaw. Of all the men who had any part of this trial, it seemed to Dan that the judge alone was worried by it.

"It strikes me," Dan said to the judge, "that court procedure in Hornet county is peculiar to Hornet county."

"It'd be peculiar anywhere," Kershaw agreed, mildly.

It was then that a Box B rider pulled a foam-flecked horse to a stop in front of the courthouse and ran into the room. He pushed past Dan, circled the railing and came to stand in front of the judge. He

said something. Kershaw asked a question. Then he raised his gun and tapped the desk. "Breen, you and Galt can quit arguing about that land for awhile. Court recessed till Monday."

"Why is the Court being recessed?" Breen demanded.

"A big wagon train of settlers pulled into the lake bottom, and they aim to hold it, claiming it's government land open to homesteading. Lamson, you better get out there. They just beefed the three men Breen put there to hold it."

Your line is divine... how's your **6NX APPEAL**

6NX APPEAL IS CHEEK - APPEAL
... the smooth approach assured by Star's exclusive 6NX Process. Star Double Edge Blades are Science's answer to "Why do some guys have all the luck?" 6NX sharp, 6NX long lasting Star Blades will give your double edge razor a keener sense of duty!

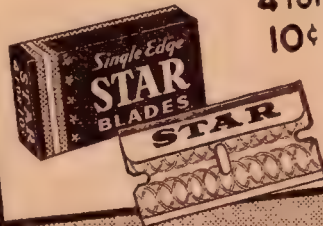
SINGLE EDGE RAZORS need Star Single Edge Blades. Billions of shaves have proved them!

DOUBLE EDGE
4 for 10¢



SINGLE EDGE

4 for
10¢



STAR BLADES

STAR DIVISION, AMERICAN SAFETY RAZOR CORP., BROOKLYN 1, N. Y.

A SENSE of far-reaching intrigue and careful scheming had been growing in Dan Galt. The note he had believed was from his father had asked him to reach Jawbone on this day. Judge Kershaw had dropped some hints, but had refused to explain them. Now it was too much to believe that the long arm of coincidence had brought a large wagon train of settlers into Hornet valley on the very day the dispute between Breen and Galt was being tried.

Lamson and the lawyers were not surprised. Dan saw that, but he saw that Kershaw was. The Judge looked from Lamson to Jake Strong and on to little Curt Armin. Then his gaze came to Dan Galt, and lingered there as if finding some comfort in the strong, high-boned face.

No one had moved. Settlers had been trickling into the valley for years, but an organized wagon train was new. The crowded courtroom was filled with townspeople and cattlemen, both bitterly opposed to a settler invasion, and the fact that it had come in strength was paralyzing knowledge to all of them.

Kershaw cleared his throat. "Lamson, I said you'd better ride out there. The court is dismissed."

"Just a moment, Judge." Jake Strong came to stand before Kershaw, brushing past Dan and utterly ignoring him. "The coming of the settlers puts a new face on this entire situation. I see no reason for recessing the court until Monday. The case is settled now."

"That's right." Curt Armin was on his feet. "Much as it grieves me, and I know it will grieve my client, I must admit that neither he nor Mel Breen have the slightest legal claim to the old lake bed."

"What?" Breen yelled. "Now look here, Armin . . ."

"Just a minute, Mel." Strong wheeled to face his client. "I'm your lawyer. I'd have stuck with you till hell froze as long as it was a matter of fighting Rocky Galt for the lake bed. It's government land, and if it's a matter of use, your claim's as good as Galt's, but neither one of you can legally hold it against settlers. That right, Judge?"

Rocky Galt had regained his composure. He sat pressed back against the seat, his face utterly white. Mel Breen was waving his good hand and bellowing a string of oaths that Kershaw could not stop by any

amount of gun butt tapping. When Breen ran out of breath, Strong broke in, "You know I wouldn't quit you if you had a chance, Mel, but it's like Armin said. You can't hold back progress. Sooner or later the settlers were bound to come. It just happened that they rolled in the day we were all here."

Strong was lying. Dan Galt would have taken his oath on that. This thing hadn't "just happened." Dan's gaze locked with Kershaw's. The judge nodded, and smiled as if he had reached the same conclusion. He asked, "Jake, how do you and Armin come to figure alike on this?"

"It's just common sense," Strong said sharply. "Mel can take it into the courts and set up a howl to the Department of the Interior, but you know how it'll go. If Breen's and Galt's range around the lake was patented land, it would be different. Breen could, as he said this morning, claim the lake bed as a riparian owner, but he can't do that for a simple reason. *The range bordering the lake is government land, therefore the uncovered areas are open to occupancy under the Homestead Law.*"

"That's right," Curt Armin agreed. "I move that you dismiss the case."

"You can't . . ." Breen began.

Kershaw pounded his desk with his gun butt. "You heard what I said, Armin. Court recessed till Monday. Meantime, I'll look into some things." He motioned toward the sheriff. "We've got murder, Lamson."

"I'm wondering about it being murder." Lamson nodded at the rider who had brought the news. "You know what happened?"

"I was on the north rim," the buckaroo answered, "when I saw this wagon outfit. Fifty or more, I reckon. The three boys who was camped by the lake pulled their guns, but they didn't get in a shot. A dozen Winchesters drilled 'em before they pulled trigger."

Lamson turned mocking eyes on Kershaw. "I reckon it ain't murder, Judge."

"Go out and investigate it," Kershaw snapped harshly. "Bring in the bodies."

Breen pushed into the aisle, jerking his head for Les Wade to follow. The Box B ramrod hesitated, then shrugged, and followed, his men trailing behind him. Kershaw's gaze was fixed on the window.

Suddenly he stepped away from his desk and came to Dan. He said, "This got here sooner than I expected." He jerked his head at Lamson. "Sheriff, you'll either get a move on and stop this fight, or I'll see the county court takes your star away from you."

"You won't take no star," Lamson said roughly.

Kershaw plodded down the aisle and into the street, Dan beside him, and slowly the dazed crowd followed, Lamson dropping back to talk with Armin and Strong. Dan, coming into the street, saw what had alarmed Kershaw. A dozen settlers had ridden into town, three of them leading horses bearing the bodies of the dead Box B buckaroos.

Breen stood in the street, great feet spread apart, Les Wade and his men fanned out behind him. The settlers reined up. One said soberly, "We're looking for the sheriff. We want to report a shooting."

"You don't need a sheriff," Breen snarled. "What you need is an undertaker. Them's my boys you got, and no damned bunch of clodbusters can claim my land and beef my men without getting trouble." He jerked a thumb at Les Wade. "Go get the artillery. We're done putting up with their damned rules about not wearing our irons."

Kershaw said, "Stand pat, Les. No trouble, Mel. If it's murder, Lamson will arrest these men and I'll see they get justice."

KERSHAW held his gun on Breen. Dan's guns were lined on the settlers. They were, he saw, different than the usual run of homesteaders he had seen who traveled in raggle-taggle outfits and who traded on their nuisance value. These men rode good horses. They carried Winchesters in their boots and .45's on their hips. They were young, thick of shoulder and square of head, and Dan Galt, who held a cowman's instinctive dislike of homesteaders, admitted grudgingly that they looked like men who had come to stay.

"Get our irons, Les," Breen rumbled, his fat face growing florid with the heat of anger.

"Not me," the little ramrod said sourly. "The Judge has got that hogleg lined on my belly."

Lamson came shouldering through the crowd. "Did I hear you ask for the sheriff?" he called loudly.

"We had a shooting near the lake," the spokesman for the settlers said. "Three men were camped on the east shore. When we drove down from the rimrock they told us to get out. We said it was government land and open for homesteading. They pulled their guns, so we had to kill them. Are you making an arrest?"

"No," Lamson said quickly. "If that's the way it was, I have no reason to make an arrest."

"Arrest or no arrest," Breen raged, "you get off that land, or I'm coming after you."

"We've come a long ways," the settler leader said calmly. "We had heard about this land before we left Kansas. We sold our farms and united into what we call the Hornet Valley Land Colony. We found the valley all that it had been described, so we're staying. We shall make our homes here, and we'd like to get along with our neighbors. If we can't, we'll fight." He leveled a square-tipped finger at Breen. "Make no mistake about it, Mister Rancher. You will have a hard job to dispossess us."

"Who described the land to you?" Dan called.

If the settlers heard, none answered. They turned their horses, and rode out of town at a fast pace. Lamson said, "Well, Judge, we didn't have a fight."

"Thanks to Dan Galt," Kershaw wheeled to face Rocky. "You've got off some hard words about your son that maybe you'd better eat. If you're not entirely blind, you could see that it was Dan and not Frank Lamson who sided me. Now you and Mel go home and work at raising some beef instead of so much hell."

Kershaw walked away. Jake Strong laughed. "The Judge is talking big today. Never thought he had guts like that." His bold, black eyes came to Dan's face. "Maybe he's been eating the same kind of raw meat you have, Galt."

"Maybe," Dan agreed. "You'd better go look for the same carcass."

"I won't need it." Strong flicked a particle of dust from his coat. "A diet of red meat burns a man's insides out. I'd say yours were about gone."

Turning, Strong took Peggy's arm, and they walked away together. Dan, holster-

ing his gun, felt a wave of frustration sweep over him. There was something here under the surface that was big and wicked, something that should have made allies out of Rocky Galt and Mel Breen. That was impossible, but he had to make the try. He said, "Dad, if you and Mel would quit hating each other long enough to think straight, you'd see you're both going to lose your hides."

Breen snorted. "Don't worry about me losing my hide, Dan." He motioned to his crew. "Let's cut the dust out of our throats. I sure as hell have got a bad taste in my mouth."

Wheeling, Breen strode toward the Buckjack, all his crew but Les Wade going with him. Rocky Galt held his place on the boardwalk in front of the courthouse for a moment, pulling uncertainly at his straggly beard, then he turned toward the Powderhorn, Frank Lamson keeping pace beside him and saying, "Don't worry none, Rocky. We'll figger out some way to get them settlers off the lake bed. Wouldn't surprise me none if Breen sent for 'em just to get his hay taken care of."

Galt stopped and stared at Lamson. "Yeah, I expect that's what happened. That clodbuster said the land had been described to them."

"We'll soon find out," Lamson said, "but right now you'd better forget this rule about not packing your guns in town. I wouldn't trust Mel Breen as far as I could throw that new bull of yours by the tail."

Les Wade idled in the dust until Rocky Galt and Lamson and the Hatchet crew had gone into the Powderhorn. He came to Dan then. He said directly, "I've never liked you because it's always been the business of the Box B to fight everything that belonged to Hatchet, but after you left this country, I found out the ruckus you had with our man wasn't your fault. I reckon you ain't hooked up with Hatchet now anyhow."

"That's right, Les," Dan said. He studied the little Box B foreman a minute. Les Wade was tough enough to handle a salty crew, wicked enough to do the kind of dirty jobs Mel Breen demanded. Still, there was a streak of decency in him, and Dan held his silence until Wade spoke his piece.

"It's all right to keep pecking at your

neighbor," Wade said, "as long as it pays, but what you said makes sense. Hatchet and Box B are either going to fight together or they'll go bust, and Mel and your dad ain't smart enough to see it."

"They never will."

"Maybe, but they won't live forever," Wade said bluntly. "I'd like to see Peggy get a ranch instead of a bunch of hot air which she'll get if she hooks up with Jake Strong. I figgered you and Peggy might get together."

Remembering how she'd slapped him that morning, Dan shook his head. "I guess not. How did she happen to take up with Strong?"

"Mel mostly," Wade said gloomily. "He's got a notion she ought to marry something besides a cow nurse."

"He'll feel different after Strong sold him out today."

Wade shrugged. "Mel ain't gonna live long. A big game going on, Dan. You and me don't see it. We're just little fry, but I've got a hunch about Mel. If you need a hand, make a loud squall."

Dan said "Thanks," and watched Wade disappear into the Buckjack. He turned then toward his horse, and mounting, took the Hornet Lake road. Les Wade, Dan thought, knew more than he wanted to put into words.

Dan turned off the road into the junipers, and angling eastward, came to a ridge that gave him a view of the road between Jawbone and the lake. Looking back, Dan swore softly and reined up his horse. Below him, between the base of the ridge and the road, Judge Kershaw was riding at a fast pace toward Hornet Lake.

CHAPTER THREE

Murder

OBVIOUSLY the judge didn't want to be seen or he'd be following the road. He wouldn't ride south to talk to either Rocky Galt or Mel Breen. That meant he wanted to see the settlers, a conclusion which raised a doubt in Dan's mind. Then Dan stiffened in the saddle. Above him and a few yards south a man lay behind a rock upthrust, the late afternoon sun shining on a rifle barrel. Even now, as Dan watched, the ambusher drew the Winchester to his

shoulder, and took a meticulous sight.

Dan snaked his .30-.30 from the boot. Kershaw passed below him entirely unaware of the danger. Dan waited until the man above squinted into the sight. Then he began firing, laying his bullets a foot apart just above the drygulcher's head, lead flattening against the rock and screaming as it ricocheted through space.

Kershaw pulled up, anxious eyes raking the side of the ridge, one hand dipping for gun. The rifleman ducked around the rock and peering down, saw Dan and fired. They were both directly above Kershaw now, and the judge, seeing him, began shooting. The ambusher triggered another slug at Dan, and dived for his horse tied in the junipers twenty yards away. Kershaw shot again, bringing the drygulcher down the slope in a loose roll.

Dan swung into the saddle and rode down the ridge. Kershaw was standing beside the dead man when Dan reined up. He said with some pride, "Pretty straight shooting for an old man." Sobering then, he added, "I'm thanking you, Dan. How did you happen to be there?"

Dan told him, and asked, "Who is he and why would he want to kill you?"

"He had a little outfit in the Blue Mountains north of here, and he tried to kill me because he was paid for the job, or so I judge," Kershaw shrugged. "Don't ask me who hired him. I've got my suspicions, but I sure as hell don't know. If I did, I'd do something about it."

"Maybe it's none of my business, but why were you headed this way?"

Kershaw's frosty face was lighted by a grin. "To talk to the settlers. Same reason you had maybe?"

Dan nodded. "They said this land was described to them, and I want to know who did the describing. Before I left town, Lamson told Dad he figured Breen had sent for the settlers so he'd get his hay taken care of."

"Lamson's a hardcase who'll sell to the highest bidder," Kershaw said savagely. "You go back to town. Get a room at the hotel and stay under cover. Soon as I get back I'll hunt you up."

Dan hesitated. "I don't like to do that. Hard to tell how the sodbusters will act."

"They had a respect for the law, or they wouldn't have come to town with the

bodies. They won't dare to hurt me."

Dan motioned toward the dead man. "Why would anybody want you killed?"

"Because I'm the one man in office in this county who won't sell out. I've been short on guts, Dan, but by hell, I've never taken a dirty dollar. And maybe somebody don't want court to open Monday. Lot of stuff going on, Dan."

"Struck me funny that Armin and Strong quit arguing today in court."

Kershaw gave him a straight look. "Dammed funny. I didn't know that Galt's and Breen's land bordering the old lake shore wasn't patented land. It probably isn't, or Galt and Breen would have said so. That would make Strong and Armin right, so I recessed court. I'll check up on it tomorrow. Meanwhile, this thing will play out to where we can see what we're up against. Go on back to town now." He motioned with a gnarled hand. "I'll be all right."

But Dan Galt wasn't sure. As he rode back to Jawbone with the dead bushwhacker lashed face down across his saddle, he felt the constant nag of worry. He had never known Abel Kershaw well. The old judge was, as Dan had pegged him, a man who considered expediency first and duty second. Now Dan was altering his opinion. The entire situation had been changed within a matter of hours, and it was Kershaw's new-found courage which had done it. That being true, his life was in danger until this strange and mysterious game had been played out to the bitter end.

Frank Lamson was in the Powderhorn with the Hatchet men when Dan rode into town. If Lamson was surprised when Dan called him out of the saloon and showed him the dead man, he gave no sign.

"Always was an ornery son," Lamson said indifferently. "Name's Hack Veen. Lived on a two-bit spread north of here a piece."

"Why would he want to kill the judge?" Dan asked.

Lamson shrugged. "Hard to tell. Probably the judge gave him a bad deal in court one time. Lots of folks around here don't like Kershaw. I'll take the carcass over to Doc's place. Looks like we'll have quite a burying."

Dan stepped into the Powderhorn, eyes probing the gloom, and saw that Bugeye

Lowrie was not there. Rocky Galt put his gaze briefly on his son, and turned his back. The Hatchet hands slowly followed Galt's example, and it was then that Dan noticed the guns on the hips of Rocky Galt's crew.

There was more bitterness in Dan Galt in that moment than there had ever been before in his life. No matter what he did, his father would never see any good in it. Anger built a flame in him, and he started across the saloon to Rocky. Then he stopped, knowing there was nothing he could say that would change this situation, that he was a fool for ever thinking Rocky Galt would look upon him as his son just as he had been a fool for thinking Rocky had sent for him.

Wheeling, Dan left the saloon. Common sense told him to go on, that there was nothing here for him, but all the time he knew he'd stay until this was finished. Searching himself, Dan could give no real reason for staying except, and he admitted to himself this was it, he still held the small hope that Peggy Breen might remember her promise that she would wait for him. There was the stirring memory of her kiss, the sweetness of her lips, the fragrance of her hair.

DAN left his mount in the stable, and found Bugeye Lowrie perched on a stool in the cafe. Bugeye said in a worried tone, "Maybe you'd better ride on before somebody makes holes in your hide."

"Reckon I'll stay," Dan grunted, and gave his order. Then he asked, "Why ain't you over there with the Hatchet outfit?"

"I don't belong to Hatchet," Bugeye growled. "Rocky fired me."

"The hell." Dan stared at the old man. "Why, you came up the trail from California with Dad."

Bugeye stirred his coffee, eyes on the black liquid. "That don't make no never mind to Rocky. I told him off this afternoon after the trouble with the settlers. Told him how big a coyote he was on account of the way he treated you. He fired me, and I'm damned glad of it." He raised rebellious eyes to Dan. "Don't you have no regret about me. I can still earn my bacon and beans, and I'm just plumb happy to get away from an outfit that crawls on its belly like Hatchet." He swallowed, and added tentatively, "Maybe I'll be riding

with you when you decide to move on. "Sure," Dan said heartily. "Don't reckon I'll be here long. Been thinking of heading for Alaska." His steak came then, and Dan reached for the ketchup. "Why is Dad and his outfit still in town?"

"They're packing their guns," Bugeye said, "waiting for Box B to start something."

"Kind of surprising after all of Dad's talk about law."

"Lamson's doing," Bugeye said sourly. "Kept saying he couldn't protect Hatchet, and they were fools to get caught by Box B without their irons. Said they'd get shot down and couldn't make a fight."

Dan looked sharply at Bugeye. "Mel Breen and Les Wade are tough maybe, but then wouldn't do that."

Bugeye nodded. "Sure, but Lamson said he'd just been talking to Jake Strong. Strong had been in the Buckjack, and he claimed the Box B boys were drinking the place dry and fixing for a finish fight."

Dan shoved back his half-eaten steak and laid a coin on the counter. "I'll go see," he said.

"Don't be as big a fool as everybody else is around here," Bugeye said quickly. "Strong's lying. Mel's in his hotel room. I saw him go in an hour ago and he ain't come out."

Reaching for his plate, Dan said thoughtfully, "Strong's engaged to Peggy. Why would he try to cook up a finish fight?"

"Maybe to get Mel Breen beefed," Bugeye guessed.

Dan thought about it, remembering Les Wade had said Mel Breen would not live long. When he had finished his steak, he said, "See you later, Bugeye," and stepped into the dusk. He paused there a moment, rolling a cigarette as his eyes raked the street. It was deserted. Lights had bloomed along both sides in the hotel, the Buckjack, the Powderhorn, and in the restaurant. Bugeye, coming up behind him, said softly, "You make a fine target in the light, son."

Dan turned. "Nobody would shoot at me. It's Kershaw they want out of the way."

Bugeye snorted. "The judge never had no backbone before, Dan. You know why he's got one now?"

"No."

"Because you're here. He figgers he can

handle Lamson or any of the rest. With you out of the way Kershaw would buckle like he's always done."

Dan brought a match to flame and held it to his cigarette, the tiny flame throwing a red glow across his lean, long-jawed face. He said, "Hadn't thought of it that way."

"We heard a lot of talk about you when you were in Arizona. Folks got to thinking you was hell on tall, red wheels with a pair of sixes which mebbeso you are, but your hide ain't tough enough to stop a slug from an alley. Anyhow, you get a hotel room and stay out of sight."

Kershaw had said the same thing. Dan nodded. "All right. I'm going to see Mel Breen."

"And Peggy maybe," Bugeye guessed shrewdly.

"Maybe," Dan said, and, angling across the street, he entered the hotel lobby.

Curt Armin was coming down the stairs. He said, "Glad you came in, Dan. Mel's in his room. Wants to see you."

It was a little too pat. Dan stiffened, eyeing the little lawyer closely. "Kind of funny for the Galt lawyer to be chinning with Mel Breen, isn't it, Curt?"

"Not at all," Armin said smoothly. "Jake and I were talking to Mel. We can see where things are going in this county, and it isn't good. You know how it is with lawyers. We live by the law, and what we had here has just about broken down today." He sobered. "Mostly due to your refusal to give up your guns. Lamson didn't care to tangle with a man of your reputation, and I don't blame him."

It was too pat, Dan thought again as he studied the little lawyer's pink-cheeked face in the lamplight. Armin might have seen him start across the street to the hotel. It could account for Armin's timely position on the stairs just as Dan entered the lobby. Yet Dan couldn't be sure.

"I'll see Mel," he said.

"Room 28. End of the hall. I'm going to talk to Rocky. If he doesn't get his men out of town, there'll be trouble."

"What does Mel want to see me about?"

"He thinks you will have some influence on Rocky. Mel's decided there's no point in two cow outfits fighting which is more horse sense than you'd expect him to have. He says Hatchet and Box B have got to fight together against the settlers."

Armin nodded pleasantly, and left the hotel. Dan climbed the stairs, a sudden tension building in him. Too many things were wrong. It wasn't like Mel Breen to send for him. It wasn't like Breen to talk about Hatchet and Box B fighting together. And Breen knew the extent of Dan's influence on his father.

Dan came down the hall, a gun in his hand, walking slowly and silently along the worn carpet. He reached Room 28, and paused, ears straining against the silence and hearing nothing that was unusual. He knocked. A man said, "Come in."

Dan couldn't recognize the voice. It sounded muffled as if the speaker had something in his mouth. Dan turned the knob and went into the room, moving fast, his cocked gun held waist-high. He came to a sudden stop, shock beating at his brain. Mel Breen lay on the floor, fat body twisted grotesquely. Dan had seen too many dead men to hold any thought that Breen was alive.

In that short space of time Dan remembered Les Wade's words; "Mel ain't gonna live long," and he remembered somebody had called to him to come in. He turned. Too late. A gun barrel rapping him across the head sent him into a forward, sprawling drop. He clung momentarily to consciousness, heard the near roar of a gun, and then a great tide carried him to a far, dark shore.

FIRST there was the consciousness of his aching head, then the mutter of voices that mingled together into an indistinguishable flow of sound. Dan pulled himself into a sitting position beside the bed, steadied himself, and presently the people in the room stopped swimming. The fog cleared away, and Dan's eyes focused on the fine-featured face of Jake Strong. His bold dark eyes were filled with a cool malice as he said, "We knew you were a gunman, Galt, but none of us thought you'd murder a man."

"Murder?" Dan asked, his mind still fuzzy as it groped into a slowly returning memory.

"That's sure as hell what it is," Strong said with unnecessary vehemence. "I heard the shooting when I was coming up the hall. I got here in time to see you holstering your gun. Mel was lying dead on the

floor. He didn't even have a gun on him."

"I didn't shoot him," Dan said, and knew immediately he was a fool for saying it. They wouldn't believe him. Jake Strong was the prosecutor and he'd enjoy seeing Dan hanged.

"You shot him all right," Lamson said. "Jake got here in time to slug you and holler for me. There was a slug in Mel's brisket, and your gun had just been fired. I reckon you'll hang, Galt."

Dan pulled himself to his feet and gripped a bed post until the nausea left him. He saw Bugeye Lowrie over by the door. Rocky Galt was in the room, face grim and unfriendly, Curt Armin and Peggy Breen beside him. As Dan's gaze met Peggy's, he did not see the hatred in her eyes he might have expected. Les Wade stood in front of the bureau, his knotty little body held stiff and expectant. There were others in the room: townsmen, Hatchet and Box B hands, a couple of ranchers from the Blue Mountains. Kershaw was not there, and Dan, knowing the judge should have been back, asked, "Where's Kershaw?"

Lamson ignored the question. He said, "I'm warning you now, Galt. Make one wrong move and you'll get drilled."

Dan Galt had arrested men and seen them hang. He'd seen the fear, the desperate desire for life in them, the wild hope for rescue stay with them until the end, and deadening that hope was the grim insight of a sure and fatal destiny. He wondered now how many of them had been guilty of the crime for which he had arrested them, or how many had been framed as he had been framed. Staring now around the room, he saw no hope. Everyone here but Bugeye and Peggy and maybe Les Wade had tried him and found him guilty.

"You don't need to use the name Galt any more," Rocky cried in a sudden rush of fury. "You've smirched that name. I hated Breen, but I wouldn't have killed him in cold blood."

Nobody paid any attention to him. Strong said, "Want to say anything before you go, Dan?"

"No."

"It might go easier if you confess."

"I wouldn't confess to a crime I didn't commit," Dan said contemptuously.

"When I get him in the calaboose, he'll confess," Lamson said, "or he'll sure as

hell get an honest-to-God working over."

"What's the use of taking him to the calaboose?" a Box B buckaroo snarled. "Let's string him up."

"I'm the law," Lamson said, without firmness. "He gets a trial."

"You couldn't keep us from hanging him," the Box B man shouted.

It would be what Lamson and Strong and maybe Curt Armin wanted. Some of the truth came to Dan then, but he wasn't sure. He said, "I can't see why you boys framed me for this job."

"You ain't framed," Lamson snarled.

"Maybe you'd better wait to hang me till Kershaw gets here."

"I don't know where Kershaw is," Strong snapped, "which has nothing to do with the case. You killed Mel, and you'll hang. That's a promise."

"All right," the Box B man shouted. "Let's get at it."

"No," Peggy said with grim finality. "Dan Galt isn't hanging."

Strong whirled to face her. "Why should you speak up for the man who murdered your father?"

"Cause he didn't shoot Mel," Les Wade said, his gun appearing in his hand. "You know damned well he didn't, Strong, but I don't know yet what your skunk game is. Get on your way, Galt. Take my roan in front of the Buckjack, and head for the Blues. Get the hell out of here."

"I'll kill you for this, Wade," Lamson cried in a wild fury.

"Not for a minute or two," Wade drawled, "'cause if you try pulling your iron I'll gut shoot you."

"A hell of a loyal ramrod you are," Strong raged.

Bugeye Lowrie had scooped up Dan's guns from the corner where Lamson had thrown them. "Ride like the devil was on your tail," he shouted. "Go on. Git."

But Dan Galt didn't hurry. He holstered one gun, kept the other in his fist. He said, "I'm not going to the Blues, Les. When I find Kershaw I'll know what's going on."

"Stop him, York," Strong bellowed.

Dan raced along the hall and down the stairs, saw the Box B rider Strong had called York grab for his gun. Dan drove a bullet into his middle, and ran out of the lobby as York toppled against the wall and fell sideways.

SOMEBODY raised a great cry from upstairs in the hotel. As Dan hit the saddle of Wade's roan, two guns cut loose from the window of Mel Breen's room. Dan felt the breath of a slug along his face, heard another splinter the front of the Buckjack, then he was pouring hoof thunder down the street. There was more shooting, but not in his direction, and Dan wondered at it as the lights of the town fell behind.

A thin moon and a great star brightness made a faint light that trickled through the junipers along the narrow road. Dan kept a fast pace directly south to Hornet Lake, trying to place the pieces of this pattern of greed and lust into their proper places, and feeling sure of only one thing. The long and well known enmity between Mel Breen and Rocky Galt, the suit over the dry lake bed, the talk of riparian right; all had been used to cover a far bigger game that was underlaid by a fine web of scheming designed to bring the feud between Hatchet and Box B to an explosive point.

Dan reached the rim and followed a twisting trail to the lake bottom. He raced on across it toward the campfires ahead of him, the black, now dry soil stretching wide on both sides of him, the rim a dark line against the somber night sky. He had almost reached the settlers' camp when a man shouted, "Hold up, or I'll plug you."

Dan pulled the roan to a stop. He called, "I want to see Judge Kershaw."

"Who are you?"

"Dan Galt."

The sentry called something, and presently a man came from the ring of wagons and warily approached Dan. He said, "If this is a trick to open us up for attack, you'll get the first bullet."

"I'm alone."

"Why are you here?"

"Mel Breen was murdered in town tonight, and I'm accused. I didn't do it, and I think Kershaw can help me locate the killer."

The settler brought a match to life and held it to Dan's face. By the tiny light Dan saw that the man he had been talking to was the spokesman of the settler party that had brought the bodies into town. Satisfied, the man said, "We're beholden to you for helping Kershaw stop a fight in town today. We don't want trouble of any kind, Galt, but if this is a double cross, you won't

WINCHESTER

TRADE MARK

FLASHLIGHTS and BATTERIES
make light
of the dark *bullet-fast*

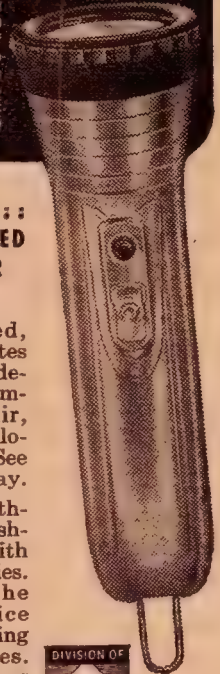


UNUSUAL LIGHTS THAT HAVE SERVED MAN . . . As you might expect, the Aztec civilization (about 3,000 years ago) did not possess our secret of convenient, portable light. Even as late as 1520, when Montezuma II met his death, the heavy cumbersome pine-splinter torch was in use. Contrast that with the bullet-fast light you get from Winchester flashlights and batteries.

**THEY'RE YOURS AGAIN . . .
WINCHESTER GUARANTEED
PURE BRASS & COPPER
FLASHLIGHT CASES**

Handsome, streamlined, naturally, they're favorites with everyone, so the demand for them is phenomenal. Result! To be fair, we've been forced to "allocate" the present supply. See your favorite retailer today.

Don't go another night without your Winchester flashlight. Be sure to load it with fresh Winchester batteries. You'll find them in the Winchester Self-Service Cabinet in all stores selling flashlights and batteries. Winchester Repeating Arms Co., New Haven, Conn., Division of Olin Industries, Inc.



get out of camp alive. I promise you."

I just want to see Kershaw," Dan said, irritation growing in him.

"Come along. He's been shot."

"Shot?"

"He was shot from the rim just as he reached the bottom. We heard the firing, and brought him in. He's not bad, but it's a good thing we found him."

Dan dismounted, and followed the homesteader into the circle of wagons. A moment later they came to a man lying beside a wagon wheel, murky lantern light falling across Abel Kershaw's wrinkled face. He said, "Hello, Dan. I thought you'd be out."

Dan hunkered beside him, and told what had happened in town. When he was finished, Kershaw said wearily, "Well, that's the shape I might have guessed it would take."

"You've done some hinting," Dan urged. "Maybe it's time I knew all you know."

"The hell of it is I don't know much," Kershaw said. "I've just got some guesses."

"I thought you'd find out who described the lake bed and got this party out here from Kansas."

"I did," Kershaw motioned toward the settler. "Tell him, Jones."

"We've had several drought years in Kansas," Jones said. "Last summer the grasshoppers about finished us. We decided to come to Oregon, and we wrote to Jake Strong asking if there was a place here where fifty families could settle and make a living. Jake had left our town five years ago. He wrote back about this lake bed."

"A year ago?" Dan turned his gaze to Kershaw. "When did that sand reef go out?"

Kershaw chuckled dryly. "Last winter." "Maybe Strong blew it out so the lake would drain out, and it would be ready for this homesteader outfit."

"That's the way I see it," Kershaw agreed, "but it's guessing."

"What did Strong get out of bringing you folks out here?" Dan asked the homesteader.

"We had some money. He asked ten thousand dollars which we gave him. He met us in the hills east of here, and asked for five thousand more. We wouldn't pay it. Said we'd settle regardless of what he did. He told us we'd have a fight on our

hands with two big cattle outfits. If we paid, he'd fix it so they'd kill each other off, so we paid, which I reckon was a mistake."

"Even fifteen thousand isn't enough for all this hell-raising," Dan said thoughtfully.

"You forget I was picked to die," Kershaw said. "They hired two bushwhackers for the job. Breen is dead, which means Peggy owns Box B and Strong was scheduled to marry her this fall. With me out of the way, Strong would undoubtedly be judge which would open the way for Curt Armin to be prosecutor. Now stop and figure out what three men like that holding the jobs of judge, sheriff, and prosecutor could do to a county."

Dan rose. "I'll see you later, Judge."

"Where you going?" Kershaw demanded.

"To see Strong."

"You crazy idiot, they'll hang you. Wait till I get on my feet, and we'll do this job together."

"It can't wait," Dan said gravely. "The time to do it is tonight. Only thing is I hate to hurt Peggy."

"Don't worry about that. I've got a hunch Peggy never was as crazy about Strong as Mel allowed she was. I'm not sure she'd have objected to your kissing her this morning if you hadn't done it in the street."

"I don't claim to be a hand with women," Dan admitted. "Maybe I should have got her into a dark corner."

"Might have worked better. Take it easy when you get into town. Get hold of Les Wade. When he made the play that let you get away, he showed how Peggy felt. You keep alive for that girl, Dan."

"I'll take them one at a time," Dan said.

But Dan, riding back through the night, did not feel as confident as he had sounded. Victory meant that Jake Strong and his plans would be smashed. Failure meant a rope fashioned for Dan Galt's neck.

CHAPTER FOUR

Lead Has a Kiss of Death

IT WAS after midnight when the ragged outline of Jawbone's buildings appeared before Dan, a few lighted windows making

their pin points of light in the darkness. Dan, remembering he had said he wasn't heading for the Blue Mountains, guessed that Frank Lamson would have men watching for him, so he circled the town and rode in from the north, going directly to the doctor's house.

Dan had known Doc Hunter nearly all his life, and he counted the medico as one of the few men in Jawbone he could depend on. He kept in the shadows, riding warily with one hand on gun butt. When he dismounted in front of the doctor's house, he stood beside a poplar, ears straining for a sound that might indicate the presence of an enemy. Hearing none, he stepped over the picket fence, followed the edge of the yard until he reached the house, and crossing the porch, knocked on the front door. It was several minutes before Doc Hunter came, a lamp held high in his hand, his white night shirt fluttering around his bony knees.

"Who is it?" Hunter asked.

"Dan Galt. I've got an idea for getting myself cleared if you'll come along with me and give me a hand."

"Sure will, Dan," the medico said heartily. "Just wait till I pull on my pants. Stay away from the light. Lamson's got men watching for you."

It was another ten minutes before Hunter left the house, carrying his black bag as he habitually did, and joined Dan at the end of the porch. Dan said, "I saw a light in Strong's house when I rode into town. I've got a hunch Curt Armin and maybe Lamson's with him. I want you to go there with me, and play up to any lead I give you."

"Sure." The medico didn't move, peering at Dan in the darkness. He asked hesitantly, "Did you hear that your father was shot and killed tonight in Mel Breen's room?"

"No."

"Funny thing. Rocky Galt never did a brave thing in his life that I heard of. Got out of Mel Breen's way like a scared pup ever since Breen came to Hornet valley, and he always treated you like dirt. Something happened to him tonight after Les Wade got the drop on Lamson. A Box B hand sneaked around behind Wade and knocked him down. Lamson and Armin got over to the window and started shooting at you.

That was when Rocky jerked his gun and drilled Armin through the head. Lamson got Rocky."

The news raised a new turbulence in Dan Galt. This father who had never been a father had died to give him a chance to get out of town. "I hope Lamson is with Strong," Dan said. "Come on."

It was two blocks to Jake Strong's house. As Dan and Hunter came along the walk to it, Dan saw that the light still burned in the windows of the lawyer's big front room. "Waiting to get word that they got you," Hunter said dryly. "Reckon he'll be surprised."

Jake Strong was surprised. He opened the door in answer to Dan's knock, and backed hastily away when he saw who it was. Dan and the medico stepped in after him, Dan heeling the door shut. Strong kept on walking backwards, his black eyes not as bold now as Dan had usually seen them, his handsome, fine-featured face taking on a gray pallor.

Dan laughed. "Worried, Jake?" They were in the front room then, and Dan saw that Frank Lamson was there. He jerked his head at the sheriff. "Lamson, Doc just told me you killed my father tonight. I don't figure you'll live long enough to hang for that killing."

Lamson shrugged. "You got things a little twisted, Galt. I knew the minute you hit town we were bound to tangle. Reckon this is as good a time as any. Pull your iron, mister."

"Wait a minute," Hunter said. "No sense of more killing, Sheriff. Maybe Dan didn't beef Mel."

Doc Hunter, like most medicos in cow towns, held a unique position. Everybody was bound to need him sooner or later, so he was a man Frank Lamson could not risk killing unless it was a case of sheer necessity. He said roughly, "We know Galt done it, Doc. No sense of wasting time listening to his palaver."

"Your time isn't so valuable," Hunter said testily. "You're a hardcase masquerading as a lawman. Now you can be lawman enough to listen. If you aren't convinced by what Dan's got to say, I reckon he'll go to jail peaceable."

Lamson's eyes were mocking when they fixed on Dan's face. "I guess you and me got each other pegged about right, Galt.

If I'd hit your Arizona town, I'd never have submitted to arrest, and I doubt like hell that you will here."

"We'll see what happens after you hear what I've got to say," Dan said. "You'll be making the choice of being a lawman or a hardcase with a star who's backing a crooked district attorney."

Jake Strong had moved back across the room until he stood beside the fireplace, one hand on the mantle, the other hooked inside his coat. He had, Dan guessed, a gun in a shoulder holster that he'd use when he saw Dan knew too much. It made long odds, but it had to be this way.

"All right." An amused grin was on Lamson's lips. "Shoot your piece, but it will have to be good to make Jake Strong out a crook."

"Kershaw is shot. He's in the settlers' camp now, alive and able to talk." He saw surprise on both Lamson's and Strong's face, and added quickly, "Strong took ten thousand dollars from these people to locate them on the old lake bed, and held them up for another five when they hit this country. That sounds like extortion, Lamson. It'll be your pleasant duty to arrest the district attorney."

"Nesters can't afford to kick up trouble in a cattlemen's country," Strong said. "You won't get far, Galt, if you think you'll talk your nester friends into coming into court to testify."

"Murder's something else," Dan snapped.

"Murder? Who do you think I murdered?" Strong demanded.

"Mel Breen."

STRONG shot a glance at Lamson and brought his gaze again to Dan. "That's pretty thin, Galt, trying to shove a murder you did off on me." He jerked his head at Lamson. "Take him down to the jug, Frank. I didn't think he'd be fool enough to walk in here like he has, but there's no use in looking a gift horse in the mouth."

Dan and Strong and Lamson knew that this case was being tried before the doctor. He would make up his mind from what he heard, and more than anyone else in the valley, he could shape public opinion for or against Lamson and Strong. It was that knowledge which kept Lamson from pulling his gun and kept Strong from precipi-

tating any violent action against Galt.

That was the way Dan read it, and he knew that what he was going to say would force the action Strong would like to avoid. It was different with Lamson. There had been that unspoken challenge between them when they'd first met.

Lamson had made no move. He was frowning, right hand sliding closer to gun butt. He said, "I'm listening for this tale which makes Jake a killer, Galt."

"Here it is. I got into town early this evening with the body of the man who made the first try at bushwhacking Kershaw. I had supper with Bugeye Lowrie, which same can be proved. It was dusk when I left the restaurant and Curt Armin told me Breen wanted to see me. Altogether, it wasn't more than an hour or so from the time I got into town until I got to Breen's room and found him lying dead. Then somebody slugged me and shot off my gun. Everybody runs in to hear Strong say I'd beefed Breen. During that hour or more I'd been in town I hadn't heard a shot, which means Breen was killed before I got here, so he must have been dead more than an hour, Doc, when you saw the body."

"Well, I'll be damned," Doc Hunter said quickly. "You're right as rain, Dan. Mel hadn't been killed just a few minutes before I got there because the body . . ."

It was enough. Jake Strong whipped his gun from his shoulder holster in exactly the same instant Frank Lamson pulled his. In that short span of time Dan had to make up his mind. He drew and pitched his first slug at Lamson because he judged the sheriff to be the more dangerous of the two. Lamson died on his feet, the breath of his slug fanning Dan's cheek, great legs spread, confidence giving way to shock. Then breaking at hip and knee, he spilled forward, blood from his chest flowing across the expensive, high-piled carpet.

Strong's gun sounded an instant later. Dan had no time to whip his Colt from Lamson to the lawyer. As the numbing slam of the bullet took him off his feet, he thought he had no time for anything, but the second bullet didn't come. Not for a moment because Doc Hunter had thrown his bag at Strong's head. The lawyer ducked, left hand batting the bag away. The time it took was enough for Dan to lift his gun and trigger a shot at Strong.

Then strength went out of Dan Galt. The light faded, and the gun dropped from his fingers as his face came down hard against the carpet.

Later there were vague memories of being carried from Strong's house, of worried talk and the dull pain and the glow of the lamp as the medico worked above him. He dropped off completely then, and it was morning before consciousness returned and with it the slow piecing together of the things which had happened.

People came into his room then, people who were his friends: Bugeye Lowrie, Les Wade, and later Judge Kershaw and Peggy. Kershaw hobbled on crutches and one good leg. He motioned toward Peggy as he said, "First off, Dan, you two ought to get together with the settlers. I've assured them there would be no trouble and that Box B and Hatchet would buy hay from them. It works good for both of you, and I don't see no sense of keeping a feud on between the settlers and the ranchers. The land's theirs all right, so you and Peggy might as well make up your minds you haven't got riparian right or any kind of a claim to it."

Dan winked at Peggy. "I guess we can get along with the settlers. We might even get along with each other."

Kershaw cleared his throat. "There's some things I've got to tell you, Dan, things I reckon nobody knew but me and Mel and your dad. Rocky used to come in and gab, just to get things off his chest. The trouble went back to when they were in California. Rocky married the woman Mel wanted. You were born, and then she ran away with Mel. Rocky jumped him, and Mel beat him almost to death.

"I've talked to other fellows who knew Rocky before then. They said he was all man, but not after Mel beat him. Rocky got a gun and started after Mel. Mel wasn't armed. Your mother was trying to hold Rocky to keep him from shooting Mel, and in the ruckus she got shot."

Kershaw cleared his throat again. "Rocky came up here to get away from it, and started Hatchet. Meanwhile, Mel married Peggy's mother, but all the time Mel was hating Rocky for killing your mother, so he started up here to push Rocky out. On the trip Peggy's mother died. After that Mel and Rocky just hated each other."

Kershaw shook his head. "Rocky was all twisted up inside, Dan. You took after your mother, and he tried to shape you into something different than you were. When you didn't shape, he got to hating you, I reckon. I was the one that sent for you, thinking you'd help Rocky and he'd start looking at you different, but it didn't work that way until he saw Les Wade take chips on your side. Some of the man he used to be must have still been in him."

Kershaw got up. "Guess you two got some things to say." He reached for his crutches. "I'm a little like Rocky myself, Dan. Haven't had the guts I should have had."

Kershaw stared down at Dan a moment, his frosty old face more kindly than Dan had ever seen it. He said, "If Hatchet and Box B were run as one outfit, Les Wade would be a danged good ramrod."

"He had a hunch Mel was going to get killed," Dan mused.

"He told me and he warned Mel, guessing that Strong wanted Mel out of the way, but Mel was too stubborn to listen to anybody," Kershaw nodded at Peggy. "Don't talk a leg off him?"

After the judge hobbled out, Dan lay looking at Peggy, filling his mind with the picture of her. He said softly, "There was a girl who kissed a fellow when he went away and she promised to wait for him."

"I gave Jake his ring back yesterday afternoon," Peggy said. "I never could have married him."

"But you wore his ring . . ."

"Dad thought that if we were engaged, Jake would work the law over to his advantage, but I never really trusted Jake. Dad began to see through him after what happened in court." She laid her hand upon his. "I'm glad you're back, Dan. I'm glad you're alive."

"You heard what the judge said about the outfits being run together."

Peggy smiled. "It sounds like a good business proposition."

This time when he reached for her and pulled her down to him, she kissed him. He didn't get slapped, and when she drew away, he winked at her. "We'll fix up that business proposition right away." He was thinking that he wouldn't be going on to Alaska after all.



By Harold
F. Cruickshank

Hackles bristling, lips peeled back over his wicked fangs, Osam lunged at the wolf.

WINTER hovered overhead as the man creature paid out lash to a jaded dog team, but the team still lagged. The big gray, wolfish creature just back of the lead dog at last lay down in her traces. Her body quivered as the long trail lash of Henri Mamuk snapped above her shoulders.

The driver could not persuade this half

The friendship of the mighty Osam, hated wolf-dog leader of the malamute pack, was given only to one woman-creature. Yet even she could never hope to hold him from the fierce destiny that bound him forever to the Law of Fang and Claw.

LORD OF FANG AND CLAW

wolf creature to move. In a frenzy, he hurtled forward, coiling his whiplash about his wrist. He raised the stock threateningly. She peeled her lips back across strong fangs but did not touch him.

Mainuk suddenly quivered. He lowered his whip and made a strange clacking sound with his tongue and teeth.

"Ayuh! So dat is it, beeg wan," he clucked. "An' of course, you could not tell me d' time had come. 'Cré nom! Dis will

mak' bad delay, an' right now I am due at Fort Reliance . . ."

Mainuk broke off and spat testily, disgustedly. He moved the dogs slowly to a sheltered spot and made the big part wolf comfortable.

As the sharp frosts of early night snapped the tamarac boles with sharp reverberations, the hybrid female gave birth to five whelpings.

Mainuk frowned as he watched the wilderness mother leave her young ones.

"Ayuh!" he gasped. "Ever' wan a good sled dog, but I can not be bother!" With some reluctance, then, he found a club and with a single blow dispatched four of the newborn whelps. When he came to the fifth, a big male whelp, even now manifesting his right to nurse, Mainuk paused. As the husky little one sprawled determinedly over his mother's well-uddered paunch, the man shook his head.

Mainuk was not dispossessed of all his wisdom. He knew that if he spared this remaining little one, the mother would be relieved of an abundant supply of milk and more quickly ready again for the trail.

Thus it was the young pup, three parts wolf and one part Great Dane, was spared. And Osam, the great, in due course reached Fort Reliance to begin a life of adventure which he started with a flourish by chewing every moccasin or mukluk he could find, not excluding the footwear of the constables of the Mounted Police.

Osam thrived throughout the balance of the winter. He had been favored with a most fortunate start in life—the whole of his mother's milk to himself. With the coming of spring his legs were sturdy and strong and his chest broad and deep. Not in all the wilds was there a set of jaws so heavy and so well-equipped with fangs. Henri Mainuk was proud of this, a potential lead dog.

Today, in the warm sunlight, Osam lay near the shingle of Artillery Lake. His short wolfish ears pricking sharply back and forth as he heard the long eerie cries of Moakwa, the loon. Suddenly he started, tensed and alert. Like lightning he whipped about to glimpse a white fox vixen coming down to the lake to drink. Osam quivered with a strange emotion. The small white creature's fangs were bared. She snarled at this awkward-looking wolf creature in her

path. He was a potential menace to her brood back at the lair zone.

Swiftly she leaped and struck—a sharp, sidewise maneuver. Her flashing fangs nicked Osam at the junction of his lips, tearing the flesh slightly.

A deep, though immature growl escaped Osam. He whirled and his deep chest stood out like some formidable bulwark as he exposed his fangs, fangs already bigger than those of the vixen. Then with a speed that belied his still awkward build, he struck. His fangs missed, but his heavy muzzle struck the fox in a flank, a terrific blow that sent her rolling down the inclined bank for many feet.

Osam did not follow up his advantage. Even in his extreme youth he was charged with an instinct which prompted him to hold off—males of his kind did not, save in rare instances, kill the females of similar species.

A low, half snarl rumbled deep in Osam's young throat. The tips of his ears curled forward. In anger and hatred his hackles rose and every fibre of nerve and muscle tensed with a readiness for further battle action if the vixen willed such. But she had had enough of him and she minced on to the water's edge to drink, now and then casting a sly glance back over her shoulder, to snarl.

Osam now turned, scratched sand with his claws as if to declare his contempt, then broke into a bounding lope.

Headed back to the post, he took time out to match his speed with that of a gaudy, winged thing, a butterfly. He menaced a brood of young ptarmigan until the mother bird clouted him sharply with rapidly buffet-ing wings.

Osam's first lessons were sharp. He returned to the post tired out and dropped to sleep just outside the main dog compound. Soon he was twitching in that delicious state of dreams so common to his age.

WHEN Osam first felt the tug of dog harness he rebelled, baring his fangs and snapping at the man creature. But though Henri Mainuk threatened him with the stock of the whip he never struck him.

"Wan day w'en you get too sassy, I smash you wan," the French musher cried. But Mainuk knew dogs. He knew that to abuse this great, nearly all wolf creature in any manner during the days of ap-

prenticeship with the team, might bring about sharp and serious repercussions.

Mainuk was firm and in time at the pull of the lead dog ahead, Osam realized that it was best to move forward. He grew to like the resistant pressure against his broad chest. It came in the form of a challenge to his strength. There were other challenges as Mainuk carried the mail and did general freighting between Reliance and Resolution. There was the challenge of bitter blizzard winds, when every instinct had to be exercised to avert death. Treacherous ice on the Great Slave Lake was another challenge and experience which sharpened Osam's wits. Then there was hunger—hunger in spite of Mainuk's endeavor at all times to provide well for his team.

It was at such a time that Osam was called upon, for the first time to manifest his great power and skill in battle.

A sharp sickness had struck Mainuk along the back trail to Reliance. He felt limp with a fever and in spite of a struggle to make the Post, he was at last forced to make camp in a patch of scrub, stunted spruce near Snowdrift River.

It was an effort for the sick man to unhitch and feed his dogs. He found dry bark and built a fire and brewed strong black tea with which he washed down two capsules of quinine.

"Ayuh!" he grumbled. "Dis misery—mebbeso d' flu. It mus' be broke. It mus'—"

"Ou-u-u-u-u-u—" The long, high pitched wail of a wolf cut Mainuk short. He quivered. More than once before the light failed he had glimpsed, along the trail, lurking wolf shapes—at times scarcely visible against the white snow.

The man's forehead wrinkled in a deep frown. He turned a sharp glance on Osam, not yet dug in for the night. The huge hybrid sat stiffly on his haunches, muzzle high, ears pricking sharply back and forth as he sniffed into wind.

Then all at once Osam flung back his head and gave out a long, terrible wolflike call—a call far more powerful than that of the white wolf pack leader.

"*Nom d' Dieu!*" Mainuk gasped. "I better tie you up, great wan, or soon you run to battle, non?"

Mainuk secured Osam to a stunted spruce bole with a long rawhide lashing from the cariole, then found a suitable spot at which

to bed down—away from the dogs in the lee of an upturned root system to which clung a mass of moss and turf.

Henri took another tablet and another mug of scalding tea. Shortly afterward, well snuggled in his down bag, he relaxed into a deep, healing sleep.

As best he could, Osam, the great, dug himself in. He curled himself into a ball but kept the tip of his muzzle up, pointing into wind. Now and then his eyes blinked and a low growl escaped him.

From a near by tree a snowy owl, in anticipation of some easy hunting this night, croo-hrooded eerily. Save for his cries and the hiss of a light wind through the frosted scrub timber belt, the great northern night was hushed.

Now and then Osam shook drifting snow from his shoulders, rearing his head sharply as a near by lake boomed like artillery in action. Then suddenly the big one leaped from his bed, hackles up, his nerve fibres drawn taut. Around him there gleamed evil, yellow-green eyes.

Snarling, Osam lunged, but his picket rope choked him back on his haunches.

Savagely he commenced to fang his rawhide thong. He was down chewing when a blurred streak struck sharply across his line of vision. A sled malamute yelped. Then, as if that were the cue for battle, startled trail dogs leaped to action, hurling themselves into furious defensive action—the odds heavy against them.

Under the influence of his heavy doses of quinine, Mainuk slept on, until at last the mad cacophony of snarls roused him.

"*Tonnerre!*" he gasped, snatching at his rifle. He got shakily to his feet, hung unsteadily a moment, then staggered on toward the grim amphitheatre.

The bewitching, but confusing brilliance of the northern lights now baffled Mainuk as he struck the battle zone. He gasped as he saw his great leader, Osam, giving locked jaw battle to the leader of the wolf pack. But in the uncertain shifting light, Henri hesitated to shoot. He might easily have killed Osam.

He felt guilty, for he had tied Osam, handicapping him. This was not good.

Suddenly, the huge hybrid leaped backwards, relinquishing his hold on the jaw of the other. A sharp exclamation escaped Mainuk. His prized leader had given

ground. This was bad! The man raised his rifle, finger coiling around the trigger when suddenly Osam struck!

The very suddenness of Osam's backward leap had thrown the white wolf leader off guard.

The ensuing sounds of battle were horrible—thick, gurgling sounds as the massive fangs of Osam buried their deathly points deeper, deeper into the throat of his adversary. Then suddenly Osam's powerful head snapped back. Blood gushed into his face, causing him to shake his head savagely. The big white leader fell to the snow, his jugular vein and windpipe severed. Then all at once, the night was shattered by a report from Mainuk's rifle. The remainder of the wolf pack whirled from the fight to go streaking to the safety of the forest.

Taking stock, Mainuk discovered that only one of his dogs was killed, while two others were wounded, but not seriously. Two white wolves had paid the price of their depredation.

Mainuk fed the dogs an extra light ration of fish, heated up his tea and drank a mugful before again settling down for the balance of the night. A smile gathered at his mouth corners. He glowed with a pride for Osam, the great.

SICKNESS had taken a toll of Henri Mainuk's vitality. He kept to his cabin throughout the following summer, not even engaging with the Indians in fishing. With the coming of early winter, a great sadness was upon him. He was obliged to turn his mail and freight run over to a young half breed Indian. But between this man and Osam there was an established feud.

Mainuk charged his successor with abuse

of the part-wolf leader. At last, he took Osam from the team.

At this time, Jan Farley, newly appointed Ranger of the Thelon Game Preserve, and his lovely wife, reached Reliance.

Nan Farley, an ex-nurse, administered at once to Henri Mainuk's medical needs, but she was sure the musher was very sick.

"You must go out to hospital, Henri," she urged. "A few months of regular hospital treatment will bring back a lot of your lost health. It is lung trouble you have. You must have proper medical attention."

"Ayuh!" Henri, his face ashen gray, gasped as he crumpled one of Osam's ears. Suddenly he looked sharply up to Nan.

"Ver' well, then," he clucked. "I go. I go out wit' Sam next trip to Resolution. From there I fin' team goin' down to Smith. But, Miz Nan, w'at I do wit' this beeg wan, Osam?"

Nan Farley smiled and shot a questioning glance at her husband. For a long moment Jan's face was expressionless, then suddenly he nodded and Nan turned again to Mainuk.

"Osam is friendly to both Jan and me," she said. "Jan is assembling a dog team here, so why not let us take Osam, Henri. We'd be good to him. We—"

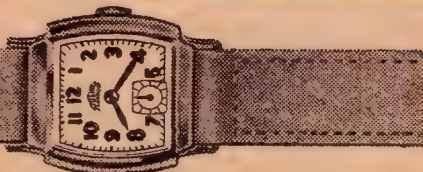
"Cre nom—uh . . ." Henri spluttered with excitement. "Dat is mos' perfec', Miz Nan. Ayuh! I shall feel 'appy now. Sure, you tak' heem—you an' Jan."

"I'll pay you your price for him, Henri," Jan Farley cut in. But Mainuk's eyes narrowed. He shook his head.

"Non, M'sieu' Jan. I owe too much to d' leetle lady already. You know w'at she do for me . . ." Henri broke off to turn away and blow his nose vigorously.



Gothic "Gem"
17 Jewels,
\$39.75**



Gothic "Cadet" 17 Jewels \$39.75**

**Prices
include
box

Gothic
JARPROOF

the only watch whose **HEART** *is*
GUARANTEED A LIFETIME

Protected by a patented mechanism, **GOTHIC JAR-PROOF** watches "can take a licking yet keep on ticking". Precision-built, exquisitely styled. Priced from \$33.75 to \$1,200. Write for free booklet "PP".



*Balance staff
and its jewels

GOTHIC JARPROOF WATCH CORP., NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

Thus, Osam, the great, came to the wild scrub country at the edge of the far-flung Barrens. Here he picked up his first whiff of the scent of Mistoos, the musk-ox leader bull, and his kindred. It was especially for the protection of these strange creatures, the musk oxen, that a Government Ranger was appointed here at Thelon.

When Farley took over from his predecessor, there were inspection trips to be made. Osam flung himself eagerly into his collar at the lead of his new team. In the cariole at his back, Nan Farley called to him. He liked her soft musical voice and the flower-like fragrance that attended her.

Though Farley had been cautioned never to show Osam any special favors along the trail, Nan secretly and frequently tossed tid-bits of food to the great one.

Now, Osam's hackles rose as he came to a halt at the edge of a clearing fringed by pygmy willows. In the clearing, the massive, horned heads of Mistoos and the lesser bulls of the musk-ox main herd lowered as they backed their lumbering, shaggy forms into a heads-out circle of protection for the cows and young stock.

Jan Farley smiled at the retiring ranger, Davies.

"Marvelous instinctive movement," he remarked.

"Right, Farley. It's a formation that serves them well against wolf attack, but you can see that it wouldn't help them much against the rifles of renegade Indians who forget the law at times."

"Have much trouble with such folk?" Jan asked.

Davies frowned, then shook his head slowly.

"N-no, not very often, but now and then a lazy buck or Esk steals in and cracks down."

"And the penalty for this?" Jan asked.

Davies smiled and stuck a balled fist up to his jaw.

"That, if I can get close enough. Off the record, of course. I try to scare them off with it, but if they get too salty, I notify the Mounted. They get run in for a month or so of wood-chopping and other work. Once, we had to send one such lawbreaker, a half breed Eskimo, to the Outside for a longer stretch. I guess he's still out at Prince Albert Pen.

Farley nodded.

They returned to the Ranger's cabin, where Jan unhitched his dogs and placed them in a compound. The Farleys and Davies were seated at supper when suddenly they were startled by a sharp chorus of snarls and yelps. The men leaped to their feet and hurtled out of doors to find the dogs in a sharp flurry of combat. The malamutes had ganged up on Osam.

With whiplash coiled around his wrist, Jan strode fearlessly into the compound and struck at the battlers. But he was careful not to belabor Osam.

"Take my advice and keep that big wolf in a separate compound, Farley," Davies suggested. "He's different—three parts wolf, at least and, except when in harness, his team-mates resent his scent. Cooped up with them he's apt to have to kill a couple."

Osam was led to a small area, a breeder compound. Alone, he sat on his haunches licking a few fang wounds, then all at once he threw up his huge head and his great jaws gaped in a yawn of utter contempt.

Leaving Osam, the great, with Nan, Farley hitched the remainder of the team to mush Davies out to the Post and then on to Resolution. He had to bring in the balance of luggage and supplies.

Nan was young and her loveliness was accentuated as she snow-shoed over the range. Osam bounded along in her trail, or, now and then, ahead.

When a white fox suddenly leaped from a stunted thicket, Osam's ruff rose. He snarled deeply, as he had not forgotten the vixen which, in his whelphood days, had fanged him. He stretched himself from Nan's side in prodigious leap and to the girl's horror was quickly in on the beautiful white creature. Nan called frantically, but Osam paid no heed. He was bent on revenge.

His great jaws closed over the trim brisket of the fox. Now, licking his great chops, he returned, but first he circled a wind-swept knoll and throwing his muzzle high, poured out a long and majestic cry of victory.

Nan shuddered. She called to him and flicked him across the muzzle with a mitten. He cowered at her feet. They turned and moved swiftly back to the cabin. Nan still quivered with the excitement of having seen the very worst, wildest side of this great creature's nature.

THE fourth night of Jan's absence, when the Barrrens looked beautiful in the floodlight of a moon, Nan stood outside the cabin enjoying the night in all its glory. Jan was due back tonight. She listened intently, but could not catch a sound of his sled runners or harness bells.

She returned indoors and settled to some sewing. But all at once, she started at the sound of a deep-throated growl. Her breast began to heave in swift indulations as she imagined she heard the crunch of snow just outside the cabin door.

Then, to her horror, she saw the door opening—slowly opening. She got to her feet, legs quivering, as the door swung wide to admit a parka-clad man whose hideous, pock-marked face leered at her in the lamplight.

"Me—Joe, Eskimo Joe," he clucked. One of Nan's hands flew to her breast. This was the man Davies had had sent out to Prince Albert Penitentiary.

"You nize wan," he blubbered. "I watch you two, t'ree tam. You got good grub, huh?"

Frightened almost out of her wits, Nan felt suddenly limp. She shot a glance up at her carbine lying in its caribou-antler rack on the wall. But it was out of reach, and the man creature was closing in on her.

"I ver 'ungry," he clucked. "You mak' grub, yes?"

Nan gasped.

"Yes. Yes, get grub ready. I warm up." She started to move toward the cookstove, choosing a route around her table which would bring her within reach of her rifle, when suddenly, with a thick snarl, the breed stepped in and caught her roughly into his arms. He pulled her sharply to him, his breathing fast and harsh. Nan saw the evil passion light in his dark, slant eyes. Now he closed his mouth on hers and she almost sank to the floor in a swoon.

His fingers were clawing deeper, deeper into her flesh when in desperation she flung herself back and managed to free herself of his embrace. Her lips parted, but for a long moment no sound came. But when again the man creature lunged toward her, she managed to step back a pace and scream.

"Osam!" Her wild scream of the great one's name was all she could manage before the breed, despite her struggles, seized her again and drew her into that horrible em-

brace. Her knees buckled and only dimly did she hear the great paws of Osam strike the split pole door.

A savage snarl startled the half breed who swung, dropping the helpless girl to the floor. His hand flashed to a hunting knife at his belt, but Osam struck with terrible suddenness. His great fangs closed over the man's wrist and fiercely he shook his huge head from side to side, pouring out horrible guttural snarls.

Nan Farley recovered and struggled to her feet to find the man creature down on his face, limply alert while astride him, his terrible fangs gleaming in the lamplight, stood Osam.

The girl reached for her Winchester and pulled back the hammer.

"Back Osam, boy. Back!" she commanded.

The savage hybrid emitted a deeper snarl, but withdrew, backing toward the door. Then suddenly he whirled, cocking his head.

To Nan's great delight and utter relief, she heard the welcome jangle of bells, as Jan swung his team into the home area.

Jan caught his trembling wife to him and for a long moment he was perplexed by her sobs. They now hurried to the shack, where Farley gasped as he glimpsed the prone form on the cabin floor.

"Name of heaven! This settles it, honey," he breathed. "I'll never leave you alone again. . . . My gosh! If it hadn't been for Osam, you—" He broke off, gathering Nan warmly to him. For a long moment Nan clung to him, then both started. The hideous man creature was stirring. He was bleeding badly and Nan went swiftly to work to render him aid.

At sunrise the following morning, with Nan warmly wrapped in the back of the cariole, Jan Farley mushed his prisoner out to the police post.

* * *

Winter whooped down in its violence. Farley made regular trips about his reserve. Now and then he picked up the tracks of packed wolves which menaced the herds of musk ox, but not, so far, had the white killers done damage.

As January rushed to its close Osam, the great, acted with sudden, strange restlessness. Twice in the nights of the approach of the full of the moon, he absented himself from his compound.

One night, as Jan and his wife sat talking, they were interrupted by a long, high-pitched wolf cry which broke the eerie silence of the Barrens and then suddenly, startlingly, from immediately out of doors, there sounded an answering call from Osam.

Jan started from his chair. He reached for his parka and mittens and cap. He ran outdoors, with Nan beside him.

Again from a point to eastward, there came the high-pitched cry of a she-wolf, then Osam's deeper-throated answer.

Jan started off with long-legged strides, Nan hurrying to keep pace with him. They crossed a small swale into the open tundra. Suddenly Jan halted, squeezing Nan's arm against his side. He raised his free arm and pointed off to eastward.

Not more than a hundred yards distant, plainly etched in the moonlight, sat a beautiful white she-wolf. Her muzzle was thrust toward the moon and from her throat there came a long, plaintive call.

A dark form streaked from a near by thicket.

"Osam!" Nan gasped. She clung tightly to her husband as they watched their great hybrid leader stretch to join his first mate—a wildling mate of beauty.

FOR a long moment both creatures stood as if carved pieces of statuary, splashed by the full brilliance of the moon. Then all at once, Osam leaped high, whirling in mid-air to begin a series of show-off acrobatics for this his first, potential mate.

Now Nan squeezed her husband's arm. Together they stood and watched Osam sift like the wind down to the side of his mate. They rubbed flanks and Osam flicked the white one's muzzle with his own darting tongue.

Then all at once, he whirled and bounded off, the beautiful white creature loping along in his trail until the shadows swallowed them from view.

"And that's how it goes, honey," Jan Farley breathed. "Our only hope that we'll ever be able to hold him again is in the fact that he has some Great Dane blood in his veins. Instinctively the wild wolf mates for life, but for Osam—well, we'll have to wait and see."

They moved back to their cabin where for some time Nan sat staring into blank space.

Her attachment to Osam was very great.

Five nights later, as the Farleys prepared for bed, they were startled by a scratching at their door. Jan advanced cautiously to open the door.

Osam, the great, staggered in, falling, whimpering.

"Quick, Nan, he's hurt!" Jan clipped, dropping to his knees beside the hard-panting hybrid's side. Nan came swiftly in to make her examination of Osam's lacerations.

"What do you think, Jan?" she asked. "Do you think these are fang marks?"

Jan shook his head.

"N-no, Nan, dear. It could be a musk-ox, but I haven't come across a single sign of a wolf raid. I hope it isn't the work of Mistoos' horns. Nan—I think Osam was slashed by the brow tines of a bull caribou, but let's get to work."

Osam's wounds required stitches. Nan expertly attended to this. She talked softly as she performed her surgical work on the big one.

Within the week, Osam began to pace the floor restlessly. His wounds were healed and from time to time he whined and scratched at the door.

Then one night the Farleys heard the long, high wail of a she-wolf. Osam lunged to the door. Smiling, Jan Farley opened the door, and the great team leader hurtled on into the frosty night.

Out of doors, at the stoop, the Farleys watched him, Nan quivering against her husband's side as Osam stretched into the maw of deep night.

Indoors again, Jan looked up from his book, to cast a sly glance at Nan. Her gaze was directed toward the door. Suddenly she turned, as if conscious that her husband's glance was on her.

"Well, Jan, what do you think?"

"I give up, honey. We can just hope—that's all. But don't be surprised if Osam shows up again. Soon, his mate will bring to light a litter of magnificent whelps. I'd like to see them; I'd like to own one, for they will be the most magnificent creatures in all the wilds—the young of a proud Barrens King."

The northern night closed in and Nan Farley's eyes closed as she relaxed to dream, to hope for the return of Osam, the king.



TRAIL BLAZERS *of the* FRONTIER

• DRAMATIC HIGHLIGHTS IN THE LIVES OF OUR PIONEERS •

by CEDRIC W. WINDAS



1

Captain Harry Love came to California in 1857 to take up the chase of Joaquin Murietta and his elusive gang. Singlehanded, Love produced results that were the envy and admiration of every sheriff and marshal in the Golden State.



Murietta's mob had defied capture for more than a decade. Now Harry harried them at every hideout. In his first contact he killed Three-fingered Jack, Joaquin's murderous lieutenant. Much to Love's disgust the bandit leader escaped.



3

But the captain ferreted them out again. He captured Murietta's brother-in-law, Reyes Feliz, who danced into eternity at the end of a rope. Again the gang fled, but Harry kept doggedly at their heels, killing them off one by one.



Love's labor was not lost. Finally he caught up with the bandit chief. Murietta jumped his horse over a precipice. The horse was killed. Murietta ran a few paces, but frontier justice caught up with him at last, via Love's Colts.

SHOT IN THE DARK

By Gunnison Steele



A MAN'S eyes, Jed Trumbo had heard, are the windows to his soul. Many times, during the last few weeks, he had been afraid that old Adam Hawn would look into his pale eyes and see the threatening, murderous nature that was really his.

Trumbo was a blocky, blond young giant. Now he drove a last nail into the corral gate, tested it with a shake, and grinned with faked satisfaction.

"That does it," he said. "You sure

"This," said old Adam Hawn, "is the first time I've let anybody see my money cache, but I know I can trust you." And Jed knew that it was not only the first time the old prospector would show it. It would also be the last!

there's nothin' else you want me to do?"

"Why, I reckon not, Jed." Adam was a wiry, white-bearded oldster whose scarecrow garb belied the wealth Jed knew he had. "Anyway, you got no call to be doin' all these things for me."

"Shucks, I don't mind it. Work never hurt a young feller like me. And you're—"

"—gettin' old?" Adam nodded solemnly. "Won't be long now till I'll be crossin' the last river."

"Hogwash!" Jed scoffed. "I didn't mean that. You'll live to see a lot of the young hellions on this range planted."

"Maybe you're right at that, by jinks! I'm seventy-eight and still fulla ginger. Only trouble is, the likker they make nowadays ain't hardly fit'n to drink."

"I bet you've got a bottle somewhere close, though," Jed hinted broadly.

Adam chuckled. "Allus keep it, just in case of snake bite. Let's go into the house, younker."

Jed Trumbo needed no urging. You never could tell—maybe this would be the time. He looked covertly but carefully about as they went toward the log cabin ranch house. Adam Hawn lived alone here in the cabin on Cultus Creek. He raised a few cattle, merely as a side-line. For the old man, as Jed well knew, owned a half interest in a silver mine over at Redpeak.

In the tiny kitchen, Adam took a bottle from a home-made cabinet and poured whisky into two glasses.

"You've been mighty good to me, Jed," the oldster declared, smacking his lips. "Keepin' ever'thing ship-shape about the place, and bringin' things from town for me, since my rheumatism got worse. Don't know how I'd got along without yuh."

"Forget it, oldtimer. What're neighbors for?"

"Just the same, don't anybody else bother to do things for me like you do. You're my kind of man. Like me, you like a drink now and then. Not like that nephew of mine, Sam, who works at the mine up in Redpeak. He's allus doggin' at me about my drinkin', and about me livin' off down here in this cabin when I could have a fine house with servants in town. Says I'm gettin' too old to take care of myself." The old man snorted. "I figure that whipper snapper ain't worryin' too much about me gettin' old. He's my next of kin, and accordin' to law

he stands to get all I own when I take the long trail."

"A man has to be his own judge." Jed said piously. "Me now, just so I have plenty to eat, and friends, I'm satisfied."

"What I say, by dogies!" They had another drink and went back into the front room of the cabin. "Me, I figure I'm plumb lucky. For forty years I looked for gold, aimin' when I found it to buy me a little ranch in the hills where there was plenty shade and water. Instead, me and Lute Northup run across that vein of silver, which was just as good. Now I've got that little outfit, and I aim to stay here till my string's played out."

Which may not be long, Jed Trumbo thought sardonically. He listened impatiently as the oldster chattered on. For several weeks he'd put up with this, doing chores for Adam Hawn, making himself as ingratiating and agreeable as possible. For it was pretty common knowledge that Adam Hawn had a money cache somewhere about his cabin.

CUNNINGLY, Jed had worked to gain Adam Hawn's confidence, always with one end in view: the finding and looting of that money cache. He knew that he would probably have to kill the gullible oldster, but that worried him not at all. It wouldn't be the first man he'd killed.

"A swell little outfit, and a fine neighbor," Adam was saying. "What more could a man ask? If I'd ever had a son, Jed, I'd wanted him to be like you. Another drink?"

"Two's plenty," Jed declared. "Besides, I was headed for town and I've got to be ridin' on. Anything yuh want me to bring?"

"Well, now, I hate to put yuh to any more trouble, but I do need some things. Some flour and tobacco, and a couple more bottles and. . . ."

He named several other items.

"I'll be glad to bring 'em," Jed said, getting to his feet.

"I'll get you the money to pay for 'em."

Jed's heart leaped with eager triumph.

For Adam Hawn had gone to the back of the room, placed a chair against the wall, mounted the chair and pushed aside a picture frame. An improvised panel several inches in length was revealed. Adam removed the panel, and Jed, staring greedily, saw that the shallow cavity was crammed

with banknotes of many denominations.

Stealthily, Jed drew his gun.

"You're the first one I ever let see this cache," Adam chuckled. "But I know I can trust you."

"Sure you can trust me," Jed said coldly.

Something in Jed's tone made the oldster turn his head. He saw the gun in Jed's hand, feral, wicked light in his pale eyes. Adam's lips gaped with surprise.

He begged, "Don't, Jed—I aimed to—"

Flame from Jed's gun lashed out and hit old Adam in the stomach. The oldster jackknifed, groaned, tumbled forward to the floor and after a moment lay still.

Jed Trumbo looked without pity down at the man he'd killed. Then, because he was a coward at heart, panic began to flow through him. What if somebody had been nearer and heard the shot? Quickly he cleaned out the money cache, cramming the banknotes inside his shirt. Then he ran outside and leaped onto his horse.

Behind Adam Hawn's cabin was a belt of timber. In front of it was a meadow that was slashed by Cultus Creek. The dim trail which a mile farther on merged with the wagon road that led to Silver Bow, threaded this meadow.

Suddenly, as he started to spur away from the cabin, Jed stiffened in the saddle. A rider was coming along the trail on the far side of the creek. Even at that distance Jed recognized the rider. It was Slim Riker, a Block L puncher.

Obviously Slim had heard the shot. He was coming on at a gallop, looking toward the cabin.

Jed wheeled his roan, spurred back into the dense timber. He didn't think Slim Riker had seen him—at least not well enough to recognize him—because he had been partially concealed by a line of cedars.

THEN a finger of doubt probed into his brain. What if, after all, Slim Baker had seen and recognized him? But he knew that wasn't likely. Slim had been too far away, and the cedars had been in between.

Reaching Silver Bow, he went straight to the Buckhorn saloon. Ed Thurber, a fat, bald man, was the bartender. He was Jed's friend, and of his own ilk.

"What's wrong with you?" Thurber asked. "You seem nervous."

"Nothin's wrong," Jed denied.

"Thought maybe the sheriff was breathin' on yore neck," grinned the bartender.

Sheriff "Sudden Ben" Ames was the Silver Bow law. He hated all law-breakers and he was lightning with a six-shooter.

Jed scowled. "What gave yuh that idea?"

"Why, I was just—by gosh, Slim Riker seems in a hurry!"

Through a window Jed saw Slim Riker drag his lathered horse to a halt before the sheriff's office, tumble from the saddle and run inside. He reappeared a moment later, accompanied by rawboned, gray-mustached Sudden Ben Ames. They went toward the livery stable, and five minutes later rode out of town in a buckboard, headed west toward Adam Hawn's place.

"Somethin's up," Thurber said. "I wonder what."

Jed shrugged. "I reckon we'll know in time. Maybe rustlers have been at work on the Block L herds."

"Slim wouldn't nearly kill a horse because of rustlers."

Jed ordered another drink. Doubt was plaguing him again. But he reassured himself with the thought that, if Slim Riker had seen him, the sheriff would have been after him by now. Sudden Ben had seen him ride into town.

He was still in the Buckhorn when Sheriff Sudden Ben and Riker returned to town two hours later with a blanket-covered figure in the back of the buckboard. A crowd quickly gathered about the buckboard as it halted before the funeral parlor. Sudden Ben and a couple of others lifted the blanket-wrapped figure and carried it inside.

A puncher entered the saloon a moment later, and reported, "Old Man Hawn's been killed."

"Killed?" Jed showed shocked surprise. "Adam was my closest neighbor. Who done it, and when?"

"Dunno who done it—leastwise, I don't. Slim Riker was ridin' out to see Adam, and he heard the shot that killed him."

"Did he see who done it?" Jed held his breath.

"Dunno. Him and Sudden Ben ain't puttin' out nothin'."

A coldness was inside Jed Trumbo. He *thought* he was in the clear, but he couldn't be sure. In just a little while he would know. He took another drink to still the rising panic inside him.

"Yonder comes Sudden Ben," Ed Thurber said. "Looks like he's headed for here."

Jed's head jerked around. Sheriff Sudden Ben was coming slowly along the plank walk, staring at the ground, his boots striking the boards solidly. That panic was suddenly a wild, uncontrollable thing.

He whispered to Thurber, "If he asks about me, tell him I'm not here!"

Thurber demanded, "What's wrong—what yuh been up to?"

"Just do like I said!" Jed hissed.

He went quickly to a door at the back of the room, opened it and went into a back room, closing the door behind him. The room contained only a table and several chairs. There was only one door, the one by which he had entered.

Jed stood tensely near the door, listening, hoping desperately that Sudden Ben would go on past the Buckhorn. Then that hope deserted him, as he heard the slow, solid thud of boots cross the barroom.

"I'M LOOKIN' for Jed Trumbo," Sudden Ben said. "He here?"

"Why, no," Thurber lied. "You want to see him about somethin' important?"

"Yeah, I'd say it was important. Jed's bronc's outside. You sure he ain't been here?"

"He was here, but he's gone now. If yuh'll tell me what you want to see him about, maybe I can—"

"My business is with Jed," Sudden Ben said curtly. "And I think you're lyin', Thurber! I think he's still here. Mind if I have a look-see?"

The boots thudded again, and Jed knew that Sudden Ben was coming toward the

door behind which he crouched. Swearing with bitter hopelessness, he whirled, leaped across the room and started tugging at the closed window. It stuck, and with a savage kick of his boot he shattered the glass.

The door opened behind him.

"Just a minute, Jed!" Sudden Ben called. "What's yore hurry? I got somethin' to say to you!"

"Blast yuh!" he snarled. "You'll never put a rope about my neck!"

Sudden Ben said softly, "Then you admit yuh done it?"

"What'd be the use denyin' it, after what Slim Riker saw? Sure I done it, and I'm dang glad of it!"

"Then I'll take yore gun—"

"You'll take some hot lead!"

Jed Trumbo snatched at his gun.

Gun-flame churned the room; thunder beat back from the walls. Jed Trumbo grunted, slumped forward—dead.

"So it was Jed that killed old Adam," a puncher exclaimed. "Lucky Slim Riker saw him as he rode away."

"Slim didn't see him," Sudden Ben declared. "He heard the shot, but he didn't have any idea who fired it."

"Then how'd you know it was Jed?"

"I didn't, not until he up and admitted it and grabbed for his gun. I hadn't even suspected him."

"But you came after him—"

"No, I didn't come after him." Sudden Ben shook his head grimly. "It was Jed's conscience that made him think that. I just wanted to tell him about the new will old Adam made a week ago, leavin' everything he owned to the man he thought was his friend—Jed Trumbo!"

YOU GET THEM
ALL IN



CERTIFIED
PUREX
at your dealer's

Check List of Pipe Value



◀ IMPORTED BRIAR ✓
BOWL (vita-fused for sweetness)

▶ ALUMINUM SAFETY LOCK ✓

▲ ALUMINUM MOISTURE TRAP ✓

▼ ALUMINUM SHANK LINING ✓

\$3⁵⁰ Model No. 14.
Dozens of other
handsome models.
Plain or antique.

Made by L & H Stern Inc., makers of
LHS Stemcrest Pipes \$5, \$7.50, \$10

Burgess saw his chance and took it. He hauled his own mount back a few steps, alongside Haneman's wagon.



By Cliff M. Bisbee

CHAPTER ONE

No Sheep Wanted!

BOB BURGESS and Danny Truax were drifting three bands of sheep toward summer feed in the Sierra Nevadas. In a buckboard drawn by a span

of red mules, Bob Burgess was headed for the wheat-growers' town of Guache. He needed supplies for his sheepherders—and a fresh batch of cartridges for his and Danny's guns.

"There's nothin' like bein' primed," Danny Truax had pointed out, "when we go to push them sheep through some of the Hanemans' best wheat."

The first man Bob ran into when he'd

SHEEPERS DIE FIRST!



Hard-Hitting Novel of Fighting Sheepmen

climbed from the wagon and snubbed his team to a hitch pole, was Stony Peralta, another sheepman. Peralta's stained, uneven teeth showed through a week-old black beard that glistened with sweat.

"If it ain't the two-bit, would-be sheep-

man from down in the Basin. What you doing in Guache, Burgess? Aim to trade your woollies for a harvest outfit and a few pitchforks?"

Bob hooked a thumb into his belt and stepped onto the graveled walk that ran

Like the cork in a whiskey bottle, powerful Pete Haneman plugged up the last outlet that spelled life or ruin to Bob Burgess and Danny Truax, sheepsers-on-the-prod. Bob and Danny aimed, then, either to shoot that cork out or bust the bottle—though to do either would flood that rich land with the blood of a hundred honest men.

along before weathered store fronts. There was no similarity whatsoever between the two sheepmen except their height, which was about even at six feet.

Peralta was broad and dark, and dressed in filthy clothes that reeked of sheep. He claimed to be a Basque but was more than likely a mixture of Indian and renegade white, to hear Danny Truax tell it. Danny had long ago put Bob wise to Stony Peralta and his brother Hubert. They were the kind of buzzards, Danny said, who had earned a mighty hard reputation for the sheepmen.

"If ever you have the misfortune to cross trails with the Peraltas," Danny had warned, his younger partner, "keep one hand on your poke and the other on your gun. Hubert's mean and sullen as a kicked mongrel dog, and half locoed on rotgut booze besides. Stony's got more savvy than Hub, but he's twice as ornery and treacherous. No matter what the game Stony plays it dirty. Winnin' only makes him greedier, and losin' a pot makes him poison dangerous. Watch out for them Peraltas!"

Bob eyed Stony now with a straight gaze that did not hide his contempt. He could see little excuse for even a sheepman to be as slovenly and unkempt as this man who confronted him.

Working three big bands of woollies, even when you have hired Mexican herders to eat the worst of the stink and the dust, is hardly classified as white-collar work. Nevertheless Bob Burgess always managed a shave two or three times a week. He carried along enough extra clothing on a drive so he could change before the ones he had on took life and crawled away. Besides this, his blue eyes and good teeth and clean tanned skin gave him a wholesome, healthy look that Stony Peralta could not begin to match.

"Where's your pard—that warty little rooster, Truax?" Peralta asked, when his first joshing queries went unanswered. Bob did not return the toothy smile.

"I'm not packing a wagon load of answers to damn fool questions, Peralta," he said tersely. "If I was to ask a few myself, I might inquire what *you're* doing in this neck of the woods. Generally Peralta sheep are mosyin' up the Kern River valley this time of year, from what I've heard."

Stony Peralta gave him a crooked grin. "Since you didn't ask the question, I'd

oughtn't to tell you. But I ain't as close-mouthed as some. Happens there's been several bad early grass fires up along the Kern this spring, so I'm trailin' further north. I got four bands yonder."

He waved a lazy hand westward, where the sun set over miles of rolling hills covered with wheat that was just beginning to yellow. "Reckon I'll kick 'em along Badger Creek when the sign's right."

Bob Burgess felt his square jaw harden, and his eyes squinted up against the sun. He took out a sack of makings, rolled himself a deliberate smoke and stuck it in the corner of his straight mouth. Over a lighted match he gave Peralta a cool gaze.

"The sign ain't going to be right, Stony. You know damned well that me and Danny been running up the Badger four seasons straight. Pete Haneman planted wheat all over the place this year, leaving a margin along the Badger that's maybe wide enough to trail half a dozen jackrabbits—if you watched 'em close. You sure can't heel in behind our sheep, or yours would starve. And if you flank our drive Haneman's wheat will take more hell than we've already got it slated for."

"I might answer that by tellin' you the B-T stinkers would damn well trail behind *mine*," Peralta grunted, still wearing his crooked grin, but his green eyes hard as glass.

"I might even point out that I got the men to make it stick. But since you're so pleasant and friendly-like, Burgess, I don't mind admitting I got a whole lot better idea than tryin' to put twelve thousand sheep through the twisted little chinks these wheat farmers find too rough for plowing. Look here what my camp tender found pinned to his wagon tarp last night!"

Peralta pulled a creased paper from his shirt pocket and unfolded it on the palm of his hand so Bob could read the penciled words:

To whom it may concern: Sheep and sheepherders are not wanted in this part of the country. Any gray woolly animal caught foraging on, trampling, polluting or otherwise damaging wheat fields in this vicinity will be shot on sight. The shooting process might endanger human (???) life, as honest ranchers can seldom tell the difference between sheep and their herders.

Signed: Lee Haneman.

Stony Peralta grunted as he refolded the note. "If that ain't askin' for war, then I'm no sheepman."

"Which last remark is open to argument," Bob Burgess grinned. "But at that it sure looks as if the Hanemans don't like sheep. Who's Lee Haneman? Has old Pete got a son?"

"I've heerd Pete's got an offspring. Maybe this Lee is it," Peralta answered with a curious twist to his toothy grin, as if he knew a joke, but didn't intend to tell it.

Bob decided he'd had enough talk with the 'breed sheepman. He swung away. Peralta called after him. "Hey! I didn't tell you what I got in mind—"

"Tell it to Haneman," Bob advised. "And keep out of Badger Creek."

Peralta's plans did not interest him, though the note found in his camp did. What Bob Burgess had not told the other was that in his own back pocket was an exactly similar note from Lee Haneman! It had been found by one of the Mexican herders at daylight this morning, pinned to a tent flap.

THERE were two factions in California's great San Joaquin Valley, each proclaiming the answer to the slough of de-

pression that had gripped the state since back in the sixties, when drought played hob with the cattle industry. These were the sheepmen and the wheat ranchers—and between them was a hatred both deep and bitter.

Bob Burgess was a sheepman, and proud of it. "God himself put grass in the Valley, and more of it up in the Sierras. The world is crying for wool to make clothes. Where can you find a better set-up for the sheepman than right here in California?"

That's how Bob would sound off if you gave him half a chance to start the argument. With his ex-pro prospector partner, Danny Truax, he ran his three bands of sheep between Valley and Sierra, wintering them on the rich, swamp-fed tule lands along the lower Kings River; summering in the lush mountain meadows.

"We're doin' all right, pard," little Danny Truax liked to chuckle, after a good clip in the spring or fall.

"If it wasn't for the damned wheat farmers," Bob would remind him grimly. "They ain't satisfied with plowing up a million acres of good grass; they got to block all the trails between our summer and winter feed with their blasted wheat fields."

The wheat men looked at things from

63 $\frac{1}{2}$ % Prefer Filter Pipes*

The replaceable filter in Frank MEDICO Pipes

Cuts down nicotine, whirlcools smoke.

Reduces tongue-bite, collects flakes and slugs, absorbs juices.

Cleaner, cooler smoke enters your mouth.

Replace filter when discolored.

Frank MEDICO

THE LARGEST-SELLING FILTER PIPE

\$1

with box of 10 filters

X-RAY VIEW

Only these genuine filters give you genuine Medico-Filtered Smoking. Packed only in this red-and-black box.



*American Legion Magazine Survey No. 2
"The Man Who Was GI Joe"



55M FRANK & CO., Inc., New York 22, N. Y.

their own angle. Men like blunt, gray-maned old Pete Haneman had gone into the wheat game with their eyes open, figuring it was the best bet for a big clean-up year after year. "The World's Bread Basket," they wanted to call the state. "To hell with your damned wool bags stinkin' up the country when it's goin' to be turned over to wheat ranches. . . ."

Pete Haneman was a salty old timer who had struck it rich in the gold rush back in '49—then had turned to cows for beef, hides and tallow, only to be wiped out in the drouth years of '62 and '63. Finally he went into wheat ranching—and had been reaping wealth in his spreading fields for several years. He was, at this time, the wealthiest wheat rancher in the Valley.

By the early seventies the wheat growers had spread up the San Joaquin from Sacramento, and north from the Kern River country. They left fewer and fewer gaps where the sheepman could bring their bands through on their twice-yearly trek from grass to grass. With each season, the tension between the two groups grew.

Burgess and Truax had been using the Badger Creek and its flanking slopes for the past four seasons and had come to consider it a sort of private right-of-way established by usage. And early this winter Pete Haneman had moved his gang plows and his men and mules and wagons loaded with seed wheat, right into the Badger Creek section. Now his waving fields of prime wheat—miles on miles of it on either side of the Badger—formed an effective barrier for the B-T sheep. The wheat plugged the last gap open to Bob Burgess and Danny Truax, as effectively as a cork in a whiskey bottle.

But Bob intended to pull that cork. Sheep had to eat, he argued. His were going to—even if they fattened on Haneman wheat. Lee Haneman's blunt message pinned to a tent flap had clinched in his mind what he had already suspected: that it would be impossible to make any kind of fair deal with the Hanemans.

"If I could just run onto this Lee Haneman hombre here in Guache," Bob muttered as he strode along the street, "I'd ram that chunk of paper down his gullet! And to hell with the Peralta brothers—let 'em chew their own tough jerky. Danny and I'll do as we please!"

CHAPTER TWO

Girl in Pigtails

HE FINISHED buying his camp supplies, then went to a barber shop. After a shave, hair-cut and a good hot shower he came out onto the hot street feeling cooler. He felt clean as a new silver dollar.

"Must have soaked off most of the smell," he thought, preening a little in a store window. "The barber's lavender water did for the rest."

He found a place to eat on the shaded side of the street. Over hash-brown potatoes and a big juicy T-bone steak, he smiled at the counter girl.

"No ketchup. I haven't been in the sheep business so long but what I can still take my beef steaks straight."

The girl's eyes widened pertly. "You a sheepman, mister? I thought the ranchers had run you all across the Coast Range and into the ocean—to hear some of them tell it."

"Sheep generally run easier than the men that own 'em," Bob pointed out. "Which same Pete Haneman's son, Lee, will find out."

The waitress stared at him, then burst into a queer laugh. "Pete hasn't got a son named Lee, mister."

It was Bob's turn to stare. "He hasn't? Then who—"

The girl was watching someone come along the walk out front. "Lee Haneman is coming in here for lunch," she told him, still laughing.

Bob spun around on his stool as two people came in. His eyes passed by a slim, blonde girl in a checkered shirt and faded denim pants, to the tall man with her. He wore high laced boots over foxed whipcord breeches, and a white shirt open at the neck. He walked with an arrogant swagger, that suited the high-cheeked face and bold eyes.

The waitress whispered in Bob's ear as she set down his pie. "Quite a gal, Miss Lee Haneman. She'll pare you down to size, big boy."

"Miss Lee Haneman!" Bob whispered in surprise. "You mean that yellow-haired school kid in pigtails—"

The waitress slid way with a wise nod, leaving Bob with jaw sagging.

Lee Haneman and her escort took a table near the end of the counter. Bob watched her, toying with his food, the taste gone from it. He was thinking of the hundred rounds of ammunition he had bought less than an hour ago for his gun and Danny's. He didn't relish fighting women.

She was around twenty, he judged, now that he had a better look at her. It was the pigtailed and the innocent blue eyes, plus a suggestion of freckles across a perky little nose, that had made him peg her for a kid in school. While they waited for their order the girl was speaking, angrily, to her partner.

"The Haneman outfit hired you, Jack Ellis, to line out our harvester crews and to see that more wheat goes into the sacks than falls on the ground. That doesn't give you a license to order me around. When that half broken mule kicked Dad in the shin and laid him up in bed over at the home ranch, I talked him into letting me see to it that the Haneman ranches stayed right side up."

"Talked him into it," the tall foreman echoed, with a broad grin that failed to cover the irony of his tone. "I can believe that, Lee."

She poked a spoon at him as though she meant to jam it into one of his cold gray eyes. "It puts me one up over you, Jack my lad," she gave back grimly. "And don't think I'll let you switch the deck on me."

"I'm only thinking of your own beautiful hide," Ellis grumbled bluntly. "I'd hate to see it stretched on some shepherd's wagon box. You sure begged trouble, putting those notes around last night. If you'd listen to me—"

"I don't believe in beating around the bush. Neither does Dad. Of course, he doesn't know about the notes, but," she tossed her pigtailed defiantly. "I put 'em out—now it's up to you to back my fight talk by putting men on the yonder edge of our plantings. If you don't, Mr. Prettyboy Ellis, I'll tend to the chore myself."

Bob Burgess finally quit admiring the girl's spunk and recalled what he had come to town for. He slid from his stool and walked over close to the table.

"I couldn't help overhearing some of your remarks to this gentleman, ma'am."

Her eyes came up quickly and her smile revealed very nice teeth. "I never could learn to tone my voice down like a lady."

Jack Ellis was giving Bob an indifferent inspection. He had lit a cigaret and it jerked in his narrow lips. "What's it to you, cowboy?"

Bob grinned. "Thank you kindly."

"For what?"

"Calling me a cowboy. I'm not."

"It makes you even," the girl said. Her eyes were suddenly wary. "You called Jack a gentleman."

Bob faced the girl again, his features now a hard mask. He took the crumpled note from his pocket and began methodically tearing it into shreds, palming the pieces in his left hand. He talked slowly, in a clear, flat voice.

"Dear Miss Haneman: Yours of the 26th received and contents noted. In reply let me point out that for every B-T sheep wilfully injured, shot or otherwise annoyed by any employee of yours, one acre of Haneman wheat will be destroyed. Correction. Ten acres. With little respect, Burgess and Truax."

THE foreman's doubled fist, pale and soft from wearing gloves, came down on the table edge. "So you are Burgess! I won't sit here and listen to a lot of idle threats. I told Miss Haneman she shouldn't have bothered—"

"Shut up, Jack!" Lee cut in. Her blue eyes never left Bob's face. "We're not going to lose a lot of wheat, Mr. Sheepman. We're going to protect it. You can take your animals to the mountains by some other route."

"No route that's feasible—where there's feed enough growing to carry us along." Deliberately he tossed the torn note onto the table. Lee ignored it.

"Then hold them until we harvest. In a few weeks—"

"In a few weeks our sheep would starve, Miss Haneman, Unless," he added with a grim smile, "you'd care to feed them for us while we're waiting."

She turned to Ellis. "You see, Jack? Dad warned me we could never bargain with the sheepmen—that we'd have to take steps." Her eyes came back to Bob, cool and assured.

"I hear you have joined forces with the Peralta brothers. They have a hard reputation—but it won't do you any good. Both your outfits together wouldn't make a de-

cent combine crew—and we run six. If necessary I'll put every man we can hire to patrolling the fields. And they will not carry bean shooters, Mr. Burgess."

"I appreciate the warning, ma'am—and you're sure a pretty girl. Even prettier than your field boss here and he's somethin' to beat in those fancy pants." Bob got his town hat from the peg, then asked them easily, "Who told you I'd thrown in with the Peraltas?"

"Stony Peralta. About an hour ago."

"You're not the only sheepman who came to town to get a breath of something besides the odor of your trade," Jack Ellis put in, still red around the ears at Bob's jibe.

"Stony Peralta," Bob informed them, "is a bigger liar than I thought he was." He gave Lee Haneman a polite nod and headed for the street.

OUT on Badger Creek a mile or so below the Haneman wheat plantings the first band of B-T sheep was bedding down for the night. The herder and his two dogs had brought his band down into a wide flat arroyo, the dogs expertly working them into a tight circle which would remain unbroken until daylight.

Up on a round, brush-topped hill overlooking the arroyo three men sat their horses lazily, watching the sheep settle down while the herder unpacked his two burros and began to set up his simple camp.

Hubert Peralta and two of the Peralta renegade gun hands had a chore to do and they were waiting until the sign was right to do it.

Hub Peralta was a short, wide-shouldered man with coarse features and a sloping forehead. He had beady black eyes and the way his head was thrust forward on a short thick neck made him look like a moderately intelligent gorilla. The manner in which his long arms hung down on either side of his muscular thighs heightened the impression of an anthropoid ape that had been taught to ride a horse.

Hub's companions, a spidery little gunman named Jute Gorman, and a slack-jawed man with a long scar across one cheek whose name was Slash Peters, were both on the wanted lists of lawmen in several states.

"Damn Stony anyhow, for sending us on such a fool stunt as this," Hub was grumbling, reaching back into his saddlebags for

a quart bottle of backbone straightener. He twisted out the cork, took a long gurgling drink, then passed the bottle to the scar-faced man. He wiped his chin with a hairy paw.

"Some day I'm goin' to shoot my brother Stony in the back. Then I won't have to take any more of this kind of stuff."

"Some day you'll wake up in your blankets and find Stony's beat you to the draw by sinkin' a knife blade in your gizzard," Jute Gorman amended, reaching for the bottle. "If you're too damned yellow to put a bullet into that Mex herder so's we can stampede them Burgess-Truax woollies into Haneman's wheat why the hell don't you go stick your head in the sand while me and Slash do the job?"

"Shut up, you damned fool," Hub growled. "It ain't the Mex I'm scared of. It's Burgess or Truax. Either one of 'em's liable to come ridin' into the camp down there about the time we start to bust things loose. Stony said Burgess drove in to Guache today, but there's no law says he won't be back early. And it ain't more than a couple miles to where Danny Truax and his other Mexicans are bedding down the other two bands."

Slash Peters kept his red-rimmed eyes on the Mexican down below, who was now starting his supper fire with a few sticks he had gathered. "I don't savvy this no way," Peters mumbled, his tongue already thickened from the numerous drinks of whiskey the trio had taken since leaving their own camp about five or six miles to the south.

"Why don't we just run some of our own sheep into the Hanemans' wheat? Hell, old Pete Haneman would blow just as high and kick just as hard. Ain't that what Stony wants?"

"Sure, he wants to rile Pete into a real gun scrap so we'll have an excuse for filling the old hellion full of lead. Him and Stony had a run-in up on the Mother Lode an' Stony ain't never forgot it," Hubert was talking while he shoved his bottle neck into the saddlebag, after hogging another drink himself without offering it for a second round to the others.

"But Stony ain't going to risk Peralta sheep when B-T stuff is so handy. Besides, if we can stir it right t'wixt Burgess-Truax and Haneman we'd ought to come out of the

fracas without no law charge against us, and maybeso with the Peraltas picking up a few of the pieces. That's the way Stony's got it rigged, near as I can figger."

"With maybe a few angles he's keepin' under his hat," Gorman observed sourly. "Well, let's get the chore done."

Dragging carbines from saddle scabbards the trio rode down toward the shepherd's camp. Around them lengthening shadows of early dusk gathered in the arroyo.

* * *

The herder saw them coming down the slope, saw them fan out and bring up their guns. Already on his knees beside his supper fire, the Mexican threw himself toward his loosely piled camp gear, where his own shabby old rifle was leaning. Hub Peralta's first bullet hit him in the back, low down.

The Mexican rolled in the dust, while over near the band of sheep the two dogs barked but still obediently held their posts. The herder feebly crossed himself, tried to drag his shattered body within reach of the rifle, gave up and twisted to face the trio of grim-eyed renegades who still rode woodenly toward him.

"No, señores—no me mate!" he pleaded, propping himself on one elbow and holding up the other brown hand. "Do not kill me!"

"You're a hell of a poor shot, Hub," Jute Gorman snarled. He slid his carbine back into the scabbard. With his Colt revolver he shot the groveling herder through the forehead. The man fell backward limply.

The three murderers next turned their attention to the sheep. After callously shooting the dogs they roused the band of sheep, already made extremely nervous by the sound of guns, and got them into a stampeding run toward the Haneman wheat fields.

"Keep on their tails!" Hub Peralta ordered. "Run 'em over the sheep camp so's to blot out evidence. . . . Ain't so dark yet but what the critters'll stampede fine. Once they git into the wheat we'll leave 'em scatter to hell an' gone. Come mornin' there'll be forty acres or more lookin' like the locusts swarmed into it."

The shepherd and his camp were ground into the dust under thousands of knife-like hooves as the animals thundered wildly up the draw. The three men drove their horses back and forth across the rear

of the band, choking on the dust, firing their guns and yelling loudly to create a terrifying din.

A lone rider came over the brow of a hill off to the south, took one startled look, then rode forward at a gallup. But Hubert Peralta's nervously roving eye caught the movement. With a curse he yanked his horse aside and plunged it into a thick clump of brush, where he stopped and once more unlimbered his carbine.

The lone rider came on fast—a stooped, thin oldster with eyes fixed grimly on the plunging figures of Gorman and Peters. Hub saw that it was Danny Truax, though deepening gloom of evening hindered his sight somewhat. Truax was nearly opposite now and Hub saw him furiously jerk out his sixgun. The old man was raising it to take a sight on the nearest renegade when Hub Peralta let him have it with the carbine.

Danny Truax went out of the saddle and hit the ground hard, rolling into a low clump of wiry shrubbery where he lay sprawled, face down and very still. The horse swept on, stirrups flopping loosely.

Hub Peralta rode over and stared down at Truax, a hard grin on his thick lips. Then with a shrug he hauled around and followed after the racing band of sheep, sheathing his rifle as he rode.

"Leave the sonofagun lay," Hub muttered to himself. "Man! Wait'll Stony hears what I bagged. . . ."

CHAPTER THREE

Wool+Wheat=Gunsmoke!

PETE HANEMAN sat on his long front gallery, watching a near-full moon rise slowly over the distant Sierra peaks. The covered porch was dark and cool after the long hot day. Out beyond the big barns and corrals the swelling fields of wheat shone like burnished silver in the moonlight.

Pete shifted his right leg, stuck it out straight before him, then got out his pipe and tobacco.

"Kind of a pinkish haze over the mountains tonight, Lee. Blood on the moon!" The match flare revealed the old man's strong-chiseled features, hawk-like and fierce even in repose. His shadowed eyes turned toward the place where Lee sat against a porch column, hands clasped over

one knee and her head thrown back so that the rising moon caught gleaming streaks in her hair.

"Did you get the patrols out, Lee?" he asked, when she made no reply to his first remark.

"Yes. Four men to watch Badger Creek. Others scattered out along the western fields."

She had not told him that more than half Jack's crew of transient harvest workers had quit in a body after supper tonight. Good workers were hard enough to get, and Jack Ellis seemed to have a knack of hiring the most shiftless. One man had acted as spokesman for more than a dozen others. If she hadn't gone down to see Jack at that moment she'd have missed it.

"We hired out to harvest wheat—not to fight sheepmen," the slattern leader had grumbled uneasily. "We want our time, Jack."

Ellis had flared up. "Get your bedrolls and beat it, then! They've got three days each coming, Lee, for work getting the rigs in shape. I told you this scheme of yours would bring us trouble."

Jack was not as decisive as he might be, and was too conscious of his good looks—but she counted heavily on his loyalty. He had gone out with the others to get them strung out. They had only found arms enough for half of them, at that, but a show of force ought to discourage the sheepmen. Except that Bob Burgess did not look like a man easy to discourage, she thought soberly.

She stood up restlessly and faced the old man. "Do you think there's any chance they'd try to start their sheep through at night, Dad? Can you drive sheep at night?"

Pete snorted through his drooping mustache. "Who knows what a fool sheep man will do? If Jack didn't get his men to the Badger until a couple hours past dark, he's liable to find half the B-T woollies bedded down in our best stand of grain. Should of got 'em out there this afternoon, instead of foolin' around over in town all day."

"I guess we should have, Dad. But Jack thought if we could see Burgess, and talk with him, we might save ourselves some trouble. But you were right! You can't talk sense with a sheepman. Now—Dad, I'm worried! All that good grain. . . ."

Pete Haneman cursed softly in the dark-

ness and puffed jerkily on his ancient pipe. His chair creaked as he again sought to ease his injured leg.

"What I don't like is Stony Peralta trailin' his flea-bags up this way— If he's talked Burgess an' Truax into throwin' in with him there'll be hell to pay."

"Burgess said that was a lie of Stony's."

"Don't ever believe a sheepman," Pete countered.

The girl picked up her hat from the porch railing. She settled it on her head with an impatient yank.

"Dad, I'm going to ride out there to the Badger. Will you be all right? Do you want to go inside first?"

"I'll make out," Pete grunted. He watched her go down the steps and head toward the barns. "You watch out, Lee!"

He puffed on his pipe, cursing again, more savagely, at his own present helplessness. But there was a glint of admiration in his steely old eyes.

"More spunk in her than a dozen of these young squirts that thing they're he-men and curly wolves!" he muttered. "If one of them Peraltas so much as looks cross-eyed at her I'll make jerky out of his carcass. Damn Stony's yellow guts for comin' in here when I'm laid up like this! Damn all sheepmen and damn their blattin', stinkin' woollies!"

* * *

The mist had gone off the moon and the silver orb was riding clear of the smoky-black peaks of the Sierra Nevadas. Bob Burgess tooled his buckboard down a flat-bottomed draw and when he came to where it opened out onto the brushy bottom of Badger Creek he saw the hell that had hit the sheep camp.

It brought a chill feeling that made him shiver violently on the wagon seat. Then a kind of earthy prayer welled to his suddenly dry lips.

"God! I hope the poor herder didn't go and get himself hurt. . . ."

It didn't take much prowling around the shambles that had been the camp and bed ground to tell him it was even worse than he had thought. His first impression was that something had stampeded the sheep, maybe a grizzly that had afterward got into the herder's camp gear and grub box. But with his team of mules rolling their eyes and trembling in their harness, he knelt down

beside what had once been his Mexican herder. There was enough left of the pitiful remains to show a bullet hole.

Bob straightened to his feet slowly and looked around. Other mounds out there on the bed ground caught his eye and he walked over, while stark, bitter dismay gripped him tight. He counted ten dead sheep there within sight, all run down and trampled to death in the stampede. And he found the two dead dogs. The moonlight helped him to determine that they also had been shot.

Grimly he faced the east and the great fields of wheat that started a mile from here.

"The Hanemans," he muttered thickly. "The wheat farmers—and that girl. My God, I never thought they'd jump us like this!"

And then, behind him, he heard a low groan.

A minute later he was down beside his gray-haired old partner. "Danny—Danny!" The name came out of Bob's tight lips, almost a sob. "The dirty devils. They shot you—killed the herder, poor old Pancho, as harmless a man as ever. . . . Danny, we'll get 'em, man. We'll get 'em. Kill every damn Haneman and their filthy, pitchfork tossin' hired hands. We'll burn their precious damn wheat, tear down their barns. . . . God, Danny, don't die on me!"

DANNY TRUAX was alive, but Bob couldn't tell how long the tough old ex-pro prospector would be that way. There was so much blood, in his hair, on his clothes and on the ground where he lay that it seemed to Bob that his partner must be shot full of holes.

And then Danny startled him clear to the soles of his worn boots by suddenly heaving up to a sitting posture! The old man sat there, groaning and holding his head, while his eyes blinked dully at Bob.

Sweat was standing out on Bob's face and the relief that swept over him left him weak-kneed. "Dammit, Danny!" he grunted. "I thought sure they'd punched your last ticket clear on out!"

"Punched hell!" Danny Truax mumbled, still wagging his head and blinking.

Bob got a canteen of water from the wagon. He washed the blood off Danny's face, also mopping what he could out of the hair. After careful exploring he decided the

only wound Danny had was a two-inch furrow diagonally across his scalp.

"I never saw so much blood come out of anything, unless it was a stuck hog," he admitted, with another long sigh of relief. "Guess there's nothin bleeds like a scalp wound. Danny, you old granite-headed wart hog, you had me plumb scared! Now tell me—was it sure enough the Hanemans that run off our woollies?"

"Danged if I know who it was," Danny admitted ruefully. "After I saw the other two bands bedded down good I started over here to see how old Pancho was makin' out. Heard some shots and made it over the last hump sort of pronto-like. It was just gettin' dusky enough so's all I could make out was the sheep bein' stompeded up the draw by a couple of hombres on ridin' horses. I rode down after 'em hell-bent, and was just unlimberin' my belt gun when the whole damn world fell on top of my head!"

Danny got up with Bob's help and tested his legs. He was shaky and his head ached badly, but he managed it over to the wagon, where Bob helped him up into the seat. They couldn't see the ex-pro prospector's horse anywhere in the moonswept slopes within sight, and the gullies were too shadowed.

Bob stared up the winding arroyo where the sheep had obviously gone, wishing he knew just what had transpired. "If it was the Haneman ranch hands that killed Pancho and stampeded our band, you'd of thought they'd drive them *away* from the plantings, instead of towards them."

"Chances are they had no choice," Danny pointed out shrewdly. "It's no cinch to drive sheep after dark, even if you know what you're doin' and have dogs to help you—which these hombres didn't, on both counts, if they was Haneman hirelings. If the band's scattered yonder in the wheat someplace, I say leave 'em be for now. They ain't going to kill themselves stuffin' on grain till mornin', anyhow, and we sure don't give a hang how much damn wheat they trample underfoot. What we better do, son, is head back to where the other two bands are at. See if they're all right, or if maybeso the same thing happened there."

"I guess you're right," Bob agreed, and he swung the red mules around.

They spent an hour driving back, with Bob driving and Danny hanging onto the lurching seat and cursing softly at the pain

in his head, which was increased by the jouncing over uneven ground. But when they got to the place where their other two Mexican herders had thrown in together for the night's camp, everything was quiet. Off in the murky shadows of the arroyo the two big bands of sheep were peacefully resting, with only normal shifting about.

The dogs barked, then went quiet as they recognized the men in the wagon, and the two herders sat up sleepily in their blankets. They rubbed their eyes and stared up in dumb wonder at the grim, lined faces of their two bosses. Danny Truax had a piece of ripped shirt-tail wrapped around his head and some of it showed under the brim of his floppy black hat, because the hat rode high on the crude bandage, and was tilted to one side at a rakish angle to avoid the tender wound. And Bob Burgess, the younger boss, looked bleak and angry and torn with something that might be grief and might be partly something else.

Bob unhooked the tired red mules, hobbled them and turned them loose. With Danny and the two wondering Mexicans watching, he found a couple of short cotton leal ropes. He walked out in the moonlight to where two horses and several burros grazed quietly. He caught his own horse first, a big stockingfoot sorrel; then got his rope on the other one, a spare bay that he and Danny rode as a extra sometimes, or that was often used as a pack animal. He led the two horses back to the camp.

"If you don't feel up to going back with me, Danny, I'll turn the bay loose. I aim to prowl Pancho's camp some, then follow on up to see what become of the sheep."

"You couldn't keep me here," Danny mumbled, "if I was hogtied. My head is giving me just enough hell to make me damn good and mad. All I want, is to get my guns lined on the sons that did that dirty job tonight."

Bob nodded and proceeded to saddle both horses. When they were ready he turned to the herders. Danny had already told the pair what had happened at the other camp. They all loved old Pancho, who had been the sort of laughing, easy-going, good-natured Mexican who makes a friend of everybody.

"You fellas get dressed," Bob ordered. "I don't figger you're going to get jumped, or it'd of been done already. But we'll take

no chances. Pad up your beds to look like you're still layin' in 'em. Then take your rifles—I brought plenty ammunition from town—and lay up behind that pile of boulders above the sheep. Keep your eyes peeled. Don't go to sleep. If anybody comes monkeyin' around the sheep or your camp, watch 'em close. If you even suspicion a hostile move, shoot to make it stick. Don't ask no questions—just shoot like you were killing wolves or bears that was bothering the sheep. Me and Danny'll try to be back 'fore daylight. If we ain't graze the bands out around here close till we show up."

He dug into one of the grub boxes he had brought out from Guache and came up with a quart of whiskey. He passed the bottle to the Mexicans, who grinned appreciatively. After they each took a long drink Bob and Danny had theirs. Then Bob smashed the still half full bottle over a boulder.

"That's all any of us are going to get," he told them, grinning. "I don't want anybody getting drunk till the war's over. Then we'll throw a real buster to celebrate."

The Mexicans answered his grin with flashing white teeth in the moonlight. "*Si, señor*—when the war is over," one of them agreed.

"If we're still able to lift a bottle," Danny amended grimly, stepping into his saddle."

"**I** KNOW what's eatin' you, kid," Danny Truax grunted, as they rode back along their former route.

"Then you got me beat," Bob admitted. "Because I don't know myself."

Danny laughed at the tone of Bob's voice. "You don't huh? Listen, son. There's no use tryin' to kid yourself, or me either. Soon's you told me about meetin' Lee Haneman over in Guache I knowed why all this trouble smacked you so hard. Happens I've saw Lee Haneman before. Yep, over in Stockton. A mighty purty little heifer, and enough to make a young buckaroo like yourself wish some of his enemies was friends."

"Go suck a buzzard egg!" Bob growled, shifting uneasily in his saddle. "Any time I fall for a tow-headed farmer's daughter like Lee Haneman, I'll let you know."

"And give me the first invite to your weddin', I hope," Danny grinned. "Kinda irks you to figger a girl like that would give

orders to her men to commit cold-blooded murder. Bob, you danged fool, have you plumb forgot the Peraltas?"

"The Peraltas!" Bob twisted sideways to stare at his wizened little pard. "You figure it was Stony and his gun-packin' sheep-herders that jumped Pancho? Why the hell would they do that? Stony sure didn't act nor talk like he—"

"Shush!" Danny barked suddenly, yanking his horse to a stop and peering ahead. "I'm a sonofagun if there ain't some sheep yonder—and some fellers on horseback drivin' em."

"And having trouble doing it," Bob asserted, spotting a straggling dark mass on a moonlit slope ahead, a squirming blanket of animals. "They must be our sheep—though it isn't more than a third or a quarter of the band. And that fella in the white hat behind 'em—even in this light you can see he's wearin' laced boots and breeches. The same rig that Jack Ellis was wearing in town. . . ."

Ellis and his sweating, uneasy harvest hands were considerably surprised when the two grim riders appeared out of the brush with guns ready and with apparently hair-trigger intent to use them. The farmers stopped in their tracks, peering owlishly at the guns, while the sheep scattered aimlessly down the slope in the moonlight.

Jack Ellis swore. "Now what, you damned sheepherders! Aren't you satisfied—"

"I won't be satisfied until I do this," Bob said, riding close to the foreman. "Watch the rest of 'em, Danny."

Without warning he reached out and raked off Ellis's fine white hat. He brought it across the foreman's features in a raking, stinging blow, then contemptuously threw the hat to the ground. While the rancher's face mottled with anger and pain Bob took hold of his shirt front with both hands and dragged him out of the saddle. He quit his own seat at the same time and came down on top of Ellis, carrying him to the ground in reckless disregard of their mounts' hoofs.

"Stay out of it," Danny Truax warned the harvesters. "And toss your guns in a pile."

They obeyed stiffly, none of them liking this. They had not hired out with the Haneman Ranch as fighters.

Bob Burgess was finding Ellis both sup-

ple and strong. He received an elbow on the nose that nearly blinded him for a moment, and a chopping blow in the midriff that drove out his breath in an explosive blast. But he kept his advantage and pressed it hard.

It was no fist fight they had there on the hard ground in the moonlight, but a lumber-jack wrestling brawl. It was brief and vicious and Bob wound up with his left thumb pressed threateningly against his adversary's eyelid. He felt Ellis freeze under the warning pressure, with a grunt of pain.

There was silence then, broken only by their harsh breathing. It was Ellis whose voice came first.

"Go ahead and gouge. Stick a knife in my ribs. Let your pard put a bullet into me. Any man who'd deliberately run a band of stinkers into as fine a stand of wheat as we had up yonder on the mesa—"

"Too bad they got away from you," Bob snarled, bearing a little harder with his thumb. He added mockingly, "And Danny was just beginnin' to convince me it was the Peraltas that shot our herder and stampeded our woollies!"

Jack Ellis was sweating there on the ground and the moonlight glistened on his face. He gave a queer sort of jerky laugh as Bob Burgess relaxed his grip and warily came to his knees, then stood up. The ranch foreman sat up and rubbed a bruised hand across his aching eyes. When he spoke again his voice was soft with wonder.

"I'm just fool enough," he told Burgess and Truax, "to begin to believe that you fellows *didn't* put those animals in our wheat tonight."

"If it'll make you feel any better," Bob grunted, "we probably would have, come morning. We'd have kept 'em close to the Badger as we could, but we sure wouldn't have worried ourselves into a sweat if a few odd acres of prime wheat got trampled and eaten."

"Shall I still keep a gun on these pitchforks, Bob?" Danny inquired. "Seein' as we're agreed it was the Peraltas that raised all the hades tonight?"

"Forget it," Bob grunted. Then he grinned at Jack Ellis—a twisted, wry grin. "You ain't short on guts, fella. I had a notion I'd wring a squall out of you with that thumb trick. No luck."

Ellis eyed him reflectively. "Between you

and me and the woodchuck, mister, I was too scared to squall. I don't suppose," he added, keeping his measuring, level gaze on Bob, "that I could engineer a truce between you and the Hanemans long enough to administer a spanking to these Peralta people—sort of combine our resources? You see, I've had an idea in mind that—"

All of them twisted around and stared at a battered old democrat that came rattling down the slope, crashing in the light brush. There were two men in the wagon and Danny Truax, the only one of the party who had his hands on a gun at the moment, brought it uneasily around across his horse's neck.

The democrat stopped, canting sideways down the hill, and one of the men jumped out. He looked up at the stiff old man still in the seat.

"Shall I help you down, Mr. Haneman?"

"With this damned leg of mine?" the old man snapped. "No thank you, Joe."

Bob Burgess knew he was looking at Pete Haneman, and he realized with a start that the wheat king's leg was in splints and sticking out grotesquely over the dashboard. Haneman gave Bob and Danny cold stares.

"You shouldn't have come out, sir," Jack Ellis said, with respect. "I wouldn't have sent Joe in to report on finding the sheep, if I'd thought—"

"The devil with what you thought," Haneman barked harshly. "Where's Lee? Isn't she with you?"

Jack looked worried. "You mean she rode out alone, earlier?"

"What else would I mean?" the old man roared. "Where the hell is she now? Have you got other men along the fields?"

Ellis laughed, though not with mirth. "I don't know if Lee told you, but half my men quit when I wanted them to stand guard. I was going to station these men along here and there, but we ran into the damned sheep in that section of the mesa—that chunk we had earmarked for seed wheat. . . . Hell! Where do you suppose she is?"

Pete Haneman swung toward Bob and Danny. The blunt old wheat rancher was shaking with rage. "By God, if anything happens to my girl, you sheep men will answer for it! Stony Peralta has been wanting to take a crack at me for ten years. If he takes this way to do it—" The old man ended with a bitter curse.

Danny looked at his young partner and cleared his throat noisily. Bob licked his lips and hesitated. He knew old Danny was waiting for him to make some move or say something that would indicate his intentions.

Bob wasn't quite sure what he wanted to do. It was pretty fairly certain that he had made a mistake in jumping Ellis over the killing of Pancho and the stampeding of the sheep. Bob didn't know if it necessarily proved it was the Peraltas who had done the deed, but it was certainly a safe bet. Stony had talked darkly in town of some plan he had in mind about getting his sheep through the wheat.

The way he looked at it, Peralta must have figured to create a fight between the B-T owners and the Haneman holdings. And Bob realized that there was no solution yet of his quarrel with Haneman. . . . Yet if something *had* happened to Lee Haneman—and Peralta was responsible—Bob shivered in the darkness. In his mind was the picture of a pretty girl in yellow pigtails, dressed like a tomboy and looking like a little girl in school—

"We lost a sheepherder tonight, Haneman," Bob told the old man tersely. "But I don't know as you're any more responsible for it than we are for your missing daughter. We'll help you find your daughter, Haneman. And after that we'll talk turkey, you hear me? I warn you Danny and I intend to get our sheep up the Badger into the mountains to our summer feed. Regardless of any private argument you may have with the Peralta brothers, this other thing still lays between us."

"Now let's quit talkin'," Danny Truax grumbled. "And get to lookin'."

CHAPTER FOUR

Flaming Wheat

STONY PERALTA spotted the little campfire in a willow-choked arroyo, and rode toward it grimly. He went cautiously for awhile, then relaxed when he was sure the three men hunched around the fire were his brother Hubert and the two gunmen, Slash Peters and Jute Gorman. The sheepman had been hunting these three for the past two hours, and he was in an ugly mood.

"All right, lay off, lay off!" he snarled, when Hubert heard him coming and whirled around for his rifle. "Don't be a bigger damned fool than you already are."

"Where the hell have you been, Stony?" Hub whined. He was always cowed by the older brother. "We was just about to head back for camp, figuring you wasn't coming."

Stony climbed off his horse and took the tin cup of coffee Jute Gorman silently handed him. The firelight gleamed on his swarthy high cheekbones and made his greenish eyes look wicked and bright. Four gunmen with him also dismounted.

"This ain't the gulch I told you to wait in," Stony grumbled. "You ain't even got brains enough to keep a rendezvous. How about the Burgess sheep? Did you get 'em scattered in the wheat like I told you?"

Hubert chuckled into his beard. "We sure did, Stony. And that ain't all—"

He stopped when Stony abruptly dropped his tin cup from slack fingers and snatched out his sixgun. Stony was peering into the darkness of the willow thicket. His head was thrust forward on the long neck, like a snake's. And then his jaw dropped suddenly, he let out a string of savage curses and strode into the thicket. He kept his gun in hand, and was staring down at a slight figure that was propped against a tree. The fringed eyes of a girl were staring up at him, in them only rage and bitter contempt;

"Hub, you crazy pinhead, what the Hades have you gone and done now?"

The girl's laugh interrupted Hub's first stammered attempt at explanation. "I can think of better names to call your brother than that, Stony Peralta. If you'll untie these ropes I could also demonstrate my scratching ability on his face."

While Slash and Jute kept a discreet and grinning silence, Hub jerked out his explanation. "We was circlin' around, lookin' for the gulch you told us to wait in, and we heerd a hoss. This girl come ridin' in the moonlight, along the edge of the wheat. I rode her down and caught her, just for the hell of it, Stony." His dark, dull eyes gleamed and his blunt fingers explored a vivid red welt down one cheek.

"It was like takin' a wild-cat!"

Stony eyed him in deep disgust. "And you drug her here with you, likewise for the hell of it, huh? Don't you know we're gonna be too busy for—"

"I was scared to turn her loose again," Hub admitted sullenly. "You said we wasn't to let no one see us—and we had killed that Mex herder and Danny Truax and—"

"You killed Truax!" Stony grinned suddenly. "Well, I'll be damned. Too bad it wasn't Burgess."

"How about me?" Lee Haneman asked from the gloom. "Are you going to let me go, Stony Peralta? Pete Haneman will make it mighty hot for you if he finds out—" She choked the words off as she saw the slow, venomous grin that began to twist Peralta's ugly face.

"Yeah," Stony said slowly, running a hard thumb reflectively along his jaw. "Hub, maybe you got something here at that. Pete ought to beller like a gut shot steer when he learns I got his daughter. He'll really come to taw!"

"What was it Pete Haneman done to you, Stony?" Jute Gorman asked.

"Damn near had me hung for beef stealin', that's what! I'd of *been* hung, only I killed the jailer and got away. Swore I'd get even with Pete Haneman when the sign was right." Stony rubbed his hands together and stared down at Lee, who suppressed a violent shudder.

"It looks," the renegade sheepman grunted with relish, "like we really got old Pete where we want him."

Jute Gorman looked around at the other gunmen, grinning, fingering his gun. A little twisted ape of a man, aching to fight. "What's the program—hunt the farmers down like coyotes? Gut shoot 'em where we find them, then watch their squirming and squealin'?"

Stony Peralta shook his head. "Why bother? We'll get 'em into a bunch—like sheep! There's a stretch of ripe wheat yonderly, where they've pulled a couple of harvest rigs in, ready to begin heading. A nice little fire had ought to bring the pitchfork tossers runnin'!"

* * *

Bob Burgess and Danny Truax were combing their second twisting arroyo when the red glare first came to their attention, building against the sky to limn the scalloped ridges. They rode angling up the slope for a better look. Near the top they ran into a couple of the harvest hands.

"Haven't saw Miss Lee," one admitted glumly, to Bob's terse query. The other man

was watching the increasing reddish glow.

"Danged if doesn't look like the wheat's afire!" he exclaimed.

"Maybe somebody fired a brush pile—as a signal," Danny pointed out.

They rode along the ridge together, Bob torn with a stubbornly grudging worry for the Haneman girl—and exasperation that they had to spend half the night aiding the ranchers. Meanwhile, he thought, Pancho's sheep were scattered from hell to breakfast, at the mercy of coyotes and other predators. And no telling what the Peraltas might have in store for the other two bands.

They overtook the almost frantic Jack Ellis and a couple more of his hands, and as they reached the edge of the plantings they came up with Pete Haneman's democrat.

Haneman was in a state, chewing on his unlit pipe, with only black glares for Bob and Danny. He inquired gruffly about Lee, and Jack informed him none of them had seen any sign of her.

"I figure she rode on back to the ranch," he said hopefully. "But damn it, look at that blaze. The devils have fired it, sir!"

They hurried along the edge of the planting, crossed a dry wash and came up onto the next flat mesa where the fire was eating a circle in the wheat. Bob and Danny kept grimly silent while the others sat their horses, close to Haneman's wagon.

"This is the section we were going to begin on," Ellis told the old man. He pointed out the dark, looming bulks of the threshing rigs, which had been pulled into the wheat just beyond the circle of flames.

"Without shovels or anything we wouldn't have a Chinaman's chance of getting that blaze out," the old man grunted savagely. "But there's ten thousand dollars in fine equipment setting yonder!"

"You're right," Ellis returned. "We'd better clear around them some way. We can pull the wheat up by hand, and save the rigs. Can't do much about the wheat, but it will burn itself out when it reaches the dry washes and greener wheat."

"I don't know why we should fool around here any longer," Bob grunted to Danny. "The girl must have gone home, and I'm damned if I'm going to lift a finger to help—"

His words dribbled out as Danny gripped his arm. Then he was staring at the string

of men who rode silently into the fire's glare from the nearby wash, to fan quickly out, hemming the wagon and the group around it on three sides. The men were armed with rifles and sixguns, and in their lead rode Stony Peralta!

"You're settin' just about right, Pete Haneman!" Peralta roared out. "And so are the rest of you. Just hold it—and let's see your hands, right up plain next to your ears!"

Bob and Danny complied silently, and saw the others do likewise. All had been taken completely off guard—had ridden, Bob knew, right into Stony Peralta's trap.

PETE HANEMAN fixed his glare on the renegade sheepman, and the hatred between them was plain to see. "You fired my wheat, Peralta—just so we'd walk into your hands. I should have seen you hung that time ten years ago."

"You tried hard enough," Stony snarled, while beside him Gorman and Hubert grinned hard grins. Stony centered his gun on the wheat king, and obviously fought a desire to fire it. He was shaking with hate.

"If I didn't have a better idea afoot, I'm damned if I wouldn't put a bullet in your belly, Haneman, just to see you kick and holler."

Bob moved his horse slowly alongside the wagon, hands up in sight, until he was a little ahead of Haneman's wagon horse, with the firelight shining on his face.

"What's on your mind, Stony? Don't keep the farmers in suspense."

Peralta peered against the growing glare, lowering his head a little, and shifting his gun. Then he grinned. "Burgess, huh? And ain't that Truax? Hub, you damned liar, you said you killed him!"

"Thanks, Stony," Danny said tightly, behind Bob, "for tipping me off." His old eyes never left the swarthy face of Hubert after that moment.

"You should have thrown in with me, Burgess," Peralta bragged. "I tried to talk to you in town, but you wouldn't listen, so I had to cut the cake different."

The sheepman swung back to Haneman and now his face was twisted with sadistic fury. "Your girl was out ridin' tonight, Haneman. Did you know that?"

Pete's line old face whitened in the firelight, and the gleaming sweat on his features

was plain. Bob, watchful and tense, felt his throat tighten with a quick sense of fear. Not for himself, but for the girl. What was Stony telling them?

The 'breed sheepman laughed, an ugly bark of sound. "Kind of jolts you, huh? I've got the girl, all right. You're damn right. She's lashed to one of the harvesters yonder, out of sight, of course. And with a gag on her purty mouth."

He looked around at his henchmen, seeking their admiration at the way he was carrying this off. Pete Haneman's muttered, deep-throated curse sounded, and Jack Ellis took in a long ragged breath and let it out slowly.

The flaming wheat crackled now with what seemed a more ominous sound. Though there was virtually no breeze the sparks were leaping high and swirling against the dark night curtain. The harvest rigs looked like some huge prehistoric monsters leering beyond the flames.

"It'll be maybe twenty minutes yet before the fire gets at them rigs," Stony pointed out. They'll burn, though, good and hot. How do you like them punkins, Haneman?"

On the wagon seat Pete Haneman looked shrunken and very old. His splinted leg twitched on the dashboard, and his fists clenched helplessly as he glared at Peralta and the other renegades.

"All right," he quavered at last. "You've got some deal, Peralta. What is it?"

Peralta chuckled, his rapacious features twisting. "Oh, I ain't so hard as some folks think. I'd hate to see that purty girl burn. Just sign a little paper I got here, Haneman, and my brother will ride over there and turn her loose."

"What kind of paper?" Haneman asked woodenly.

"A bill-of-sale. For all your wheat from here on through to Badger Creek and clear across the hills to the east side. Call it four thousand acres. This fire won't amount to much—maybe burn off a half section before it peters out."

Haneman's gaze was pulled toward the harvesters. He tongued dry lips. "What you want with wheat, Peralta?" he asked stiffly.

"Feed for my sheep, that's what. I'll graze my stuff on wheat till early fall, then trail back to the Kern River country a month ahead of anybody else, with my

sheep twice as fat. And I'll save plenty in grazing fees. It's lettin' you down easy, Haneman."

The things was a little too flimsy, Bob thought grimly. Haneman wouldn't have to honor the bill-of-sale, once signed and the girl released. Peralta would think of that—but with Haneman dead no legal force could get him off the wheat soon enough to save it. Peralta would not miss his chance for final revenge.

Whether or not Haneman also was considering these aspects, the old man stood up in the wagon now, awkwardly, propping himself with one hand while he reached the other toward Peralta.

"All right," he grunted. "Let's have your paper."

And then suddenly there came a flurry of action on the other side of the wagon. Jack Ellis let out a hoarse shout and jammed his heels into his mount's flanks, sending it forward with a leap. The foreman leaned low in a desperate crouch and headed straight toward the nearest harvester. The horse kicked up a cloud of warm black ash.

Stony Peralta whirled, snarling. But his gunman, Jute Gorman was already shooting. Ellis was nearly to the line of flames before he suddenly lurched out of the saddle and dropped in a heap on the ground. The horse veered away from the flames, back toward the open brush at the field's edge.

Every eye among both the gunmen and the ranch hands, was focused in that stark second on Jack Ellis's sprawled figure, pulled there uncontrollably.

Bob Burgess saw his chance and took it. He hauled his own mount back a few steps, alongside Haneman's wagon animal. His boot lashed out into the horse's belly and the animal, with a grunt of surprise, suddenly clattered forward. Pete Haneman was toppled backward into the wagon and Bob raced alongside it, using its shelter as he commenced firing at the renegades.

Stony Peralta was the first one to go down under that surprise assault. The sheepman half twisted in the saddle as Bob's bullet chopped into him, lifted his own gun toward his chest, then fell loosely. His gun exploded harmlessly as he went down.

Behind Bob, Danny Truax let out a triumphant roar and snatched his sixgun. Following behind his partner at a fast gait,

he aimed point-blank at Hub Peralta. The youngest Peralta brother's bearded jaws were sagging at the abruptly shattered situation. But with an already wary and uneasy eye on Truax, his gun was up and erupting flame before Danny's first shot.

Danny's horse gave a loud scream of pain and suddenly broke at the knees, going down hard. Danny rolled clear and scrambled behind the animal's dead body. And then the old man was grinning with satisfaction, for Hubert Peralta was hunched loosely over his horse's neck, blood pouring from a wound in his throat.

The badly rattled harvest hands were exchanging shots at very close range with the renegades, and as Bob brought his own mount around, away from the wagon, he saw Gorman and one other sheepman fall, while one of the wheat hands was already sprawled face down on the ground.

Pete Haneman had somehow righted himself, cursing against the raging pain in his badly wrenched leg. Still half hanging from the back of the wagon he was clinging to the lines and sawing the horse to a slithering halt. The animal fought the bit wildly, rearing and plunging in the shafts, but finally coming down more quietly.

"For God's sake, somebody get Lee out of danger!" the old man was yelling furiously.

But Bob Burgess was already through the thinning line of flame, smoke and sparks fanning up around him. He yanked his horse down and threw himself off at the same time. A hasty survey of the rigs showed the girl helplessly bound on the sacking platform of the second header. Her eyes, filled with terror at the sound of guns, burned brightly over the crude gag Peralta had provided.

Bob had her free in seconds, realized she was struggling against him, and reassured her gently. "It's all right Miss Lee. It's all right, ma'am. Both the Peraltas are dead, and your father's safe."

He guided her around the machinery to where they could see what was going on. The fight was over. The last two renegades were beating a frantic retreat; their only intent now to save their own lives.

Bob yelled to the wheat men. "There's time to save these rigs, I reckon! Bend a hand here, and we'll root out this dry wheat around close, then backfire."

And while the girl stumbled out into the

burned area to drop gently beside Jack Ellis, Bob went grimly at the chore of saving the threshing machinery. He was past thought of his own problems. Past every feeling save one of harsh and bitter triumph that their combined efforts had turned the trick on the Peraltas.

One by one the wheat men came over, raced through the thin edge of fire and fell silently to work beside him.

A WEEK after that night of red hell the Haneman wheat fields presented a picture of teeming activity. Six huge harvesters, staggered behind each other and each manned by its crew of men and drawn by eighteen-mule teams, lumbered awkwardly across the fields in a grotesque procession.

A great black scallop—a mile wide, nearly half as deep—scarred the golden acres that stretched over the horizon to the east and north. To the south, where the harvesters droned through the baking heat of mid-afternoon, some four hundred acres had already been cut and the sacks of golden wealth hauled out by dray teams. Here in the cut-over area two large bands of sheep grazed hungrily under the watchful eyes of Mexican herders and sheep-wise dogs.

Bob Burgess and Danny Truax rode along the edge of the field and stopped to survey the pastoral scene, Danny shook his gray head wonderingly.

"Never thought I'd live to see this, son," he mumbled. "Our sheep grazin' on Haneman wheat—and not anybody gettin' hostile over it!"

Bob nodded lazily. "The big harvesters are kind of wasteful, dropping and tramplin' down plenty of good wheat. Don't pay for the wheat men to rake it up, but our sheep can sure grow fat on it. And the sheep are fertilizing the fields for next year's plantings!"

Danny chuckled. "Yep, and it was Stony Peralta put the idea in our noggins! Saves us trailin' a hundred miles into the Sierras, by gannies."

They had heard that the Peralta sheep had been heavily mortgaged, and that the bank took them over. They were being trailed back toward the Valley, on slim pickings.

A sharp rattling of wheels caught the attention of the partners. They turned to see

the Haneman democrat tooling along the edge of the fields—bearing no one but Miss Lee Haneman. Danny caught Bob's almost imperceptible sigh. He poked him in the ribs with a hard thumb.

"Dogged if I'd of let that slick-haired foreman beat my time with the purty heifer if it was me. And him in bed with a bullet through him, at that!"

"That's just it," Bob admitted ruefully. "Wasn't fair to try hornin' in, with Ellis unable to defend his interests!"

The girl was close now, and she gave them a wave and a smile, pulling her horse to a stop. She got nimbly down and came over to where they sat their horses—prettier than ever in a starched calico dress of gay printed pattern.

"You've been deliberately avoiding me, Bob Burgess!" she accused severely. "Don't you realize Dad isn't the only one grateful for your help that awful night? Or is there something the matter with me—personally?"

Her eyes were frankly on Bob's, and he could see stirring flecks of gold in them, reflections of the waving wheat. For once he was at a loss.

"Why—uh—we been awful busy, Miss Lee," he stammered.

Danny chuckled immoderately. "The way Bob moons around our camp, he might's well be some place else." He added baldly.

THE END

"Ain't nothin' on his mind but a certain wheat king's yaller-haired daughter!"

"Really?" Lee murmured. But there was a telling flush on her smooth cheeks. She pulled an envelope from a dress pocket and held it toward Bob.

"By the way, Jack sent this note to you. Incidentally, he'll be out of bed in a few more days. That chest wound is healing nicely."

Bob read the note. He blinked, glanced quickly at Lee's innocent face and read it again. The note said:

Dear Burgess,

I thought you were a wise *paisano*! Lee's a fine nurse—and very entertaining with her bedside chatter. Mostly it concerns her wonder at why Bob Burgess doesn't give her a tumble. Hard on a girl's self-respect! As for me—in case you wondered—I'm just an unnecessary incident in her life. Worse luck! And drop around, fella. Ellis."

Lee was looking at him slantwise. "Business, no doubt . . ." Bob crumpled the note and stuck it in his pocket. Suddenly he grinned at her.

"Yeah. Listen, Miss Lee—Lee—why don't you and I take a ride one of these days? You could sort of show me over the ranch."

Her flashing smile held quick—and promising warmth.

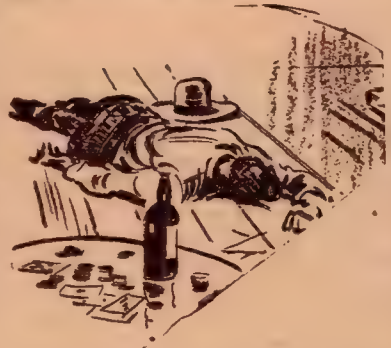
"I'd be glad to, Bob."

Comin' Out of Next Month's Chute!

No one who thrills to the vigorous spell of hard-hitting, colorful Western fiction will want to miss the big January issue of this magazine.

Ride with *Tom Roan*, as he blazes a red-hot bullet-trail in the lawless Montana badlands, in "Those Shotgun River Rebels!", a lusty, fast-action saga of the days when the West was hard to curry. . . .

Enjoy the salty characters and tense drama of Western short stories by Floren, Frank, Roemer, and Sinclair, that take you from the open cattle-range, up the dusty longhorn trail to the roaring end-of-steel hell-towns. . . .



You'll find real frontier color, and real Western characters in next month's "44"—the magazine that "Brings the Old West Back to Life!"

Reserve your copy today at your newsstand. . . . Read it November 20th!

15c

44 Western
MAGAZINE

A New Hand for the Owlhoot

"Son, maybe you and me'd better have a little get-together," said the sheriff.

By
Marvin J.
Jones



SHERIFF BROOKS frowned out his office window at the dust cloud that finally dissolved in front of the saloon and left the gay and gaudily attired figure of young Ted Randall, taking a turn around the hitchrail with the reins of a long limbed, grey mare. The old lawman's lips tightened as he saw Town Marshal Miles Stanford cut across the street from the barber shop, trailed by his lynx-eyed deputy, and enter the saloon close on the boy's heels.

Sheriff Brooks sighed, eased his rangy frame out of a swivel chair, clapped a worn Stetson on his head and went out. He winced a little at the heat of the sun, and then, he too, headed for the batwings of Fox Frazier's Pack In Saloon.

Ahead of Ted Randall lay the sanctuary of the Brimstone Border . . . Behind him, always, was the grimly tenacious law-dog whose iron-bound code was "He who takes a life must pay with a life!"

The quarrel had already started when he stepped through the door. Miles Stanford, the town marshal, was a florid faced man in his late thirties, with a belly that was beginning to pouch and a reputation for bluff and bluster that was backed up by the deputy, Ozzie Twiggs, who had less to say, but a more deadly way of saying it. Miles was over by the bar, standing in front of the boy.

"Well, I'll give you until next week," the marshal was saying, with his usual bluster. "Then I'm going to that sister of yours and tell her to keep you home 'til you get dry behind the ears!"

Ted Randall's young face was pale with anger. He set his glass down with a hand that shook. For a moment, his eyes glared into Stanford's and then he lashed out with a right that rocked the marshal from head to heels.

Quick as a flash, Ozzie Twiggs stepped forward and snaked a long barreled Colt from a cut down holster. Midway through a vicious swing at Ted's head he froze into a statue. Sheriff Brooks had a .45 rammed into the reedy deputy's backbone.

"Ozzie," the old lawman said softly. "Are you sure you ain't interfering in a personal ruckus?"

The marshal, livid with rage, was fumbling for his gun, but let go of it as though the butt burned his fingers. Ted Randall had taken a quick step backward and his pearl handled Colt bored steadily into Stanford's paunch. The young man's eyes glared with a rage that made his body quiver.

"Damn you, Stanford!" he ground out furiously. "Leave me alone or I'll gut shoot you, so help me! I said I'd have the money for you."

The marshal paled a little more as he saw how the gun quivered in Ted's hand. He realized he had gone too far—especially with the sheriff keeping his deputy out of the fracas.

"Well; see that you do!" he blustered weakly and then turned to Sheriff Brooks. "See here—" he began, but a dangerous glint in the old lawman's eyes stopped him. He turned on his heel and stalked out.

Strangely enough, the thin face and crooked mouth of the deputy, Ozzie Twiggs, reflected no anger. He gave the sheriff and the boy a twisted smile, holstered his weapon and followed his boss out.

Sheriff Brooks sighed and replaced his

sixgun in its worn holster. "Ted," he said, in mild reproof. "You oughta stay clear of Miles until you can see your way clear to settle that gambling debt. Miles ain't much, but Ozzie will sneak up on you with that fast draw of his."

Ted Randall stared at the old lawman, the hotness of anger still in his eyes. "I don't want your help—or your advice either," he told the sheriff coolly, and took his drink down to the far end of the bar where the saloon owner, Fox Frazier, was watching, with a thin smile on his crafty features.

Sheriff Brooks' craggy face reddened and anger boiled up in his gray eyes, but he shrugged and left the saloon. Fox Frazier's smile grew wider and he showed his sharp teeth as he watched the old lawman cross the street.

"You got the right idea, kid," he told the boy, in his curious, toneless voice. "Don't let 'em ride you. Hell! You'd a had the two of 'em eating out of your hand, if the sheriff hadn't butted in."

The boy's anger faded under the saloon man's words and worry filled his face instead, making him appear older and a little haggard. He stared morosely at his glass, turning it in his fingers. Fox Frazier watched him, pale eyes narrow and thoughtful.

Fox kept his thoughts from the world, but inside his thin body burned a deep and undying hatred of the marshal. Miles Stanford supplemented his marshal's salary by running a table in the Ace High Saloon across the street. Under this condescending patronage, the Ace High bloomed. At the same time, Stanford kept an iron rein on any and all hilarity in the Pack In, to drive business to the favored place.

"Fox," Ted Randall said, a spot of color in each cheek, "Could you make me a loan, so that tinhorn would quit riding me? I'm short now, but I'll have the money next month."

"How much?" Frazier asked in his lifeless voice.

"Five hundred," Ted said, flushing still more.

The saloon owner stared dreamily down the bar. At last his pale eyes turned to Ted again.

"I hate to see that much money turned over to a crooked skunk like that," he said.

"What do you mean?" Ted asked him incredulously.

A thin laughter started in Fox Frazier's narrow chest and finally reached his lips. "Hell, kid," he said in his flat voice. "You don't think that was a straight game he took you in with, do you?"

YOUNG Randall's glass chattered against the bar as he set it down. His breath quickened and the sensitive nostrils flared, as the wild, hot anger came back into his eyes.

"I'll blast him—so help me—I'll blast him!" he muttered between clenched teeth.

"You can't do that," intoned the saloon owner, "but," he leaned forward, "he could be run outa town—if it was put to him right."

"Ozzie Twiggs—" the young man began hesitantly.

Again the laughter of Fox Frazier bubbled up from his thin chest. "Hell, Ted, you don't have to worry about him. Anyway," he added with his sharp toothed smile. "Ozzie is fed up with doing Miles' scrapping for him. Ozzie has his eye on the marshal's job—has had for some time. I know," the saloon owner said softly as he still saw doubt in Ted's face.

Ted Randall tossed off his drink and set the empty glass down on the bar. Fox got up lazily, got another glass and filled both of them.

"I'd give five hundred dollars, just to see that four-flushing windbag leave town," he said in his dead voice. "Maybe you wonder why Brooks horned in just now. Well, he knows Stanford is crooked, but lawmen hang together. The sheriff don't want any trouble right now, especially over a gambling debt—what with the election coming—but he'll stand back and let Stanford go ahead with his crooked gambling and keep quiet.

"Of course," the saloon owner continued. "If you blasted Stanford, Brooks would see you hang for it. It would put him in solid as a law enforcer—and at the same time—yet the suckers know that you can't burn down an officer of the law no matter what kind of a skunk he is."

"The dirty, damned bunch of crooks!" the boy said bitterly.

"Hell, kid," Fox answered tonelessly.

"They look out after each other. You got to give them credit for that. But of course," he added with his thin laugh. "They ain't gonna look out for anybody else—especially, a young fellow, who don't swing many votes."

"Yeah, I know that," Randall agreed, his face hardening.

Fox Frazier's tongue flicked out and wet his narrow lips. He took a wallet from his pocket and counted out five hundred dollars in a neat pile. "Hell," he said tonelessly. "You handle it the way you want. I don't poke my nose in people's business."

Ted Randall picked up the money hesitantly and then shoved it into his pocket. "Gosh, Fox. Thanks. I'll pay you back."

The saloon owner shrugged. "Don't worry about it." And then he added, "Say—if you want to pay Stanford off sort of private like—he'll be at the dance tonight. I guess you know why," he added, smiling thinly.

"No, I don't know why," Ted answered, sensing a hidden implication in the other man's words.

The older man coughed delicately. "Your sister—" he began finally.

Ted started and stared open mouthed at the saloon man. "My sister!" he exclaimed in astonishment. "You mean that—that—" The words choked in his throat.

"Hell, kid," Fox said in his monotonous voice. "I thought you knew he had kind of taken a shine to her."

Ted Randall's face was dead white. "No, No, I didn't know that," he said huskily. He clenched the bar, the knuckles of his fingers colorless.

"I'm sorry I mentioned it," the saloon man said. "Anyway, Ozzie won't be going with him and Miles usually comes back early. If you want to meet him on his way back, you can pay him off without Ozzie hanging over your shoulder."

This time it was Ted who filled the glasses. His hand quivered a little as he picked up his own, but his eyes were hard as agate as he looked at Fox Frazier.

"I'll pay him back," the boy said between his teeth. "Everything I owe him."

The saloon owner's sharp teeth looked unnaturally white against the red lips. "I'll bet you will too," he said in his dead, flat voice. "Here's how!" he added, lifting his glass.

"Here's how," Ted repeated mechanic-

ally. The liquor surged through him, fanning his anger to a white heat. "Everything I owe him!" he repeated grimly and set down his glass.

* * *

At nine o'clock that night, Ted Randall waited impatiently in the shadows of the blacksmith shop for Miles Stanford to come back from the dance. He puffed nervously at a cigarette, the glow partially concealed by his cupped hand. The only evidence of the liquor he had consumed was a slight, weaving unsteadiness. As time dragged by, he took a bottle from his pocket and occasionally tipped it to his lips.

"Good old Fox!" he muttered thickly, in the darkness. "Good old Fox. S'only friend I got." He wavered a bit as he held the bottle up against the distant glow of a street light.

"Mustn't drink too much," he told himself owlishly. "Gotta run the marshal outta town, the lowdown, no good, sneaking polecat." His jaw dropped as he stared at the bottle. "S'empty!" he exclaimed in amazement and hurled it off into a vacant lot.

The sound of heavy boots coming toward him out of the gloom stiffened him and brought his dulled senses to the alert. He peered at the approaching figure for a moment, then gave a grunt of satisfaction and stepped out of the shadows.

"Hello, Stanford," he said softly, as the other man stopped in sudden alarm.

Because of Ted's dressy, light colored clothing, the marshal recognized him immediately. Stanford's hand dropped so that it brushed his gunbutt as he stared at the younger man. As Ted stood quietly and made no hostile motion, the other man stepped forward.

"What are you hanging around here for?" he demanded blusteringly.

"I've been waiting for you," Ted replied, as softly as before. "I'm wise to your double dealing, crooked card playing and I want to pay you off."

Stanford stepped back hastily, fingers closing on his gun butt. "Look here, Randall—" he began and then stopped in astonishment as the boy drew a wad of bills from his shirt pocket and extended them. His face struggled between bewilderment and greed. "There wasn't any hurry," he grumbled. "I told you you could hold off 'til next week." He made no move to take the

money young Randall held out to him.

Ted knew it was fear that made the other man hesitate and he laughed grimly. He flung the money at Stanford. "Take it!" he grated coldly.

THE marshal caught it deftly and counted it with nervous fingers, before he pocketed it. "Okay," he growled. "That's all of it."

"Oh no, it isn't," Ted said, stepping forward quickly. "The rest is coming right now!" He swung a heavy right for the other man's jaw.

Stanford was ready. He had been aware of his danger ever since the boy stopped him. He ducked and the blow knocked off his hat. His hand went frantically to his holstered gun as he stumbled backward, but Ted's head was clearing rapidly now of the whiskey fumes. He dived at the marshal's legs and brought him crashing to the ground. The gun spun from the lawman's hands and disappeared in the shadows. Ted laughed grimly and scrambled to his feet. He waited for the other man to get up.

Miles Stanford rose slowly, his face contorted with pain. "You twisted my leg," he groaned. "I can't put any weight on it." He stayed hunched over, rubbing his leg, his eyes trying to seek out the missing gun.

Ted knew the marshal had not been hurt by the fall. "Stand up, you yellow bellied polecat!" he shouted furiously and swung a palm to slap him.

The marshal suddenly lunged forward, his legs driving hard and his head lowered like a battering ram. Ted's wind left him in a huge, gusty sigh and black and yellow spots danced in front of his eyes as he doubled and fell. A groan of sheer agony left his lips as the marshal landed on him with both heavy boots. Ted twisted convulsively, caught one foot and brought the lawman down on top of him. Then he rolled over and tried to pin the other down by the limp weight of his body while he fought off nausea.

Through the sickness that swept over him in great, retching waves and the numbing, furious blows of the marshal, Ted felt a hand fumbling at his side. He clapped a hand to his holster and realized the gun had been withdrawn. Stanford rolled over on top of him and then tried to break free. Ted doubled up his knees and struck out with

both feet, hurling the other man backward.

While the marshal staggered from the kick, the boy scrambled to his feet and rushed him. Stanford lashed out desperately with a heavy fist. Ted saw it coming and tried to duck under it, but he was too slow. It crashed squarely against his forehead with stunning force. He went over backward and a big orange flame seemed to explode inside his head with a deafening roar.

Ted lay dazed for an instant and then began to struggle back to his feet. There was a heavy, acrid odor in his nostrils. He stayed crouched over, trying to focus his eyes, wondering if the marshal had his gun. Then his hand struck something cold and metallic and he scooped up the pearl handled Colt with relief. He lurched to his feet and looked for Stanford, drawing great draughts of the cool night air into his tortured lungs and weaving on his feet. The marshal was nowhere in sight.

"Got away!" Ted muttered thickly. He was weak and sick from the fierce struggle and the after-effects of the liquor. He shoved the Colt in the holster, leaned against the blacksmith shop a moment and then reeled out toward the street. His foot struck a limp, yielding object in the shadows and he fell full length. Ted got to his feet shakily and looked at the huddled figure of the marshal.

"Get up!" Ted commanded, between his battered lips. He reached down and seized the fallen man by the shirt front and started to haul him to his feet. A gasp escaped his lips and he released his grip quickly and let the marshal slump down. Ted stood rigid for moments. Then, with shaking fingers, he took out a match and raked a thumbnail across it. He stared down at the yellow-white face and crimson shirt front, shuddered and hurled the flickering match to the ground.

Ted Randall stood stunned for a moment and then as an awful thought struck him, he jerked the Colt from its holster and hesitantly sniffed at the muzzle. An involuntary groan left his lips as he smelled the tang of burned powder. The pound of running feet reached him and a hurrying figure passed under the distant street light.

"Hey!" Sheriff Brooks' voice hailed him as he turned and darted back into the shadows. "Hey, Ted!"

Another groan came from the boy. He cursed the light clothing that identified him even in the uncertain light. He raced desperately around the blacksmith's shop and darted down an alley, his only thought to escape. When he reached the back of the Pack In Saloon, he went along the side of the building, strolled casually out into the street and mounted the gray mare. He kept the mare at a fast walk, turned down the first side street and let her out in a gallop.

Ted's breath came easier as he reached the edge of town and no sounds of pursuit came to his ears. He shook his head savagely to dispel the lingering effects of the liquor. The rush of cool air, billowing out his shirt and cooling his sweaty body, began to clear his thoughts. He stilled the panic that lay in his stomach like a clod and began to map out his flight. Ted murmured a prayer of thankfulness for the long limbs and deep chest of the mare. If he knew anything about the old sheriff, she would need them.

Ted Randall did not know if it was his finger that had pressed the trigger, or if it had been the marshal's. But either way, there was but one answer. Well, it was not the first time that some misfortune had sent a man to the owlhoot. Ted felt guilty of no crime and he did not intend to pay for one. He thrust remorse from his mind. He would need his head and all his cunning to escape the implacable Sheriff Brooks, whose trailing ability was legendary.

There was the matter of provisions and Ted's pulse quickened as an idea struck him. Instead of picking them up at the ranch, as the sheriff would expect, he could get them from the South line camp. Bob Morrison would probably be there, but better Bob than the scene that would follow with his sister, if he went to the ranch house. There were still no signs of a posse on his trail. No doubt the sheriff would ride alone, as usual. Ted slowed the mare to a trot, realizing that every particle of her strength might be needed in the long trail that might lay ahead.

TED roused a sleepy and touseled Bob Morrison out of a bunk at the line camp an hour before daybreak.

"I've got to have some grub," he told the line rider, who was a youth of his own age. "I'm in a jam."

Bob watched the other's preparations in speechless and wide-eyed amazement. "What'd you do?" he managed to gasp, finally, as Ted stuffed a pair of saddlebags.

"Got into a fight and killed the marshal," Ted told him dully and smiled mirthlessly as Bob's face paled. Then he added, as if to himself, because he well knew the other could not hold his tongue. "This'll get me over the border, I guess." He made the boy change clothes with him and gruffly told Bob he might keep the dressy outfit.

Bob Morrison hovered between delight and fear. "What'll I say to the sheriff, if he comes out? He'll think I helped you get away."

Ted's mouth twisted wryly at the other's nervous fears. "Tell him I pulled a gun on you," he told the other curtly and swung astride the mare. He waved carelessly, as he headed due south.

An hour's hard riding brought him to a shale cluttered canyon that twisted through the mountains and an eventual path to the Rio Grande. For a while, he rode along the stream bed, in soil soft enough to leave a track. Gradually, he chose a path so that the trail would be obliterated. Then he doubled back out of the canyon, staying on the slate and struck off to the West.

A few miles brought him to a stream. He went downstream several hundred yards, keeping the mare at a steady trot through the shallows and then up the opposite side, barely leaving a trail. Paralleling the stream until he found ground hard enough to leave no trail, he swung back to the stream and this time rode upstream more than a mile and let the mare clamber out on a rocky shelf.

Satisfied that not even an Indian could unravel his trail, Ted struck off through the mountains to the North, munching on a cold biscuit and decided his next move. At first the idea of the owlhoot gave him a sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach. He grinned wryly at the panicky feeling that arose. It wasn't a question of going off to join the owlhooters—he was already a member. Some of the wildness of the adventure suddenly gave rise to a feeling of excitement, making his heart pump faster and the blood pound dizzily in his ears. He burst into song.

When it began to grow dark, he camped by the bank of a stream. He was confident

that the sheriff could never follow the trail he had left, but as an extra precaution, he made a cold camp. Ted was ravenous and it was only with an effort that he kept from eating too heartily of his meager stock of supplies. He picketed the mare, rolled up in his blankets and for a while stared up at the stars, a grim smile on his lips. Tomorrow he would strike for the heart of the outlaw country. A wave of excitement made him tingle from head to foot. Perhaps he could join Jingle Bell Bill and his band of outcasts! When Ted did fall asleep, he slept dreamlessly.

He was up at dawn and on the way again, threading through the mountains, always climbing upward. As he reached a pass at the highest point of the climb, Ted reined in and, turning around, took a last look at the country that he was leaving—perhaps forever. As he did, a startled curse left his lips and he jerked the mare off the trail, dismounted and bellied down at the edge of the path. Perspiration broke from every pore of his body. Far below on the trail was a white speck. Ted knew, without a second look, that it was a white stallion and that the rider was Sheriff Brooks!

A shudder shook his body. He scrambled back from the rim of the trail and ran to the mare, cursing as she shied away from his eager fingers. He managed to clutch the trailing reins and swing astride. He spurred the astonished mare into a headlong gallop down the trail. The panic lasted just a minute and then Ted pulled down to a trot.

"I've got to keep my head," he told himself feverishly, but his thoughts whirled like a mill race. For the first time, Ted knew the fear of the hunted. There was something as grim and implacable as Fate itself, in the relentless pursuit of the old sheriff. A sob tore loose from the boy's throat. How had the old devil unravelled his trail?

His flight the rest of that day was almost panicky. When he came to streams, he rode up or down stream at random, but attempted no more doubling back. Night came, but he urged the mare on until to go on would have meant calamity. He slept restlessly and was up at dawn and in the saddle again, working his way still deeper into country where every path was unfamiliar. Ted realized the folly of this when the mare was brought to a halt by a gap in

the trail. A landslide had carried a portion of it away. Ted's mind raced desperately to remember how far back he would have to retrace his path in order to branch off and his heart sank, when he realized it was miles.

Ted dismounted and stood with the reins in his hand while he stared fascinatedly at the broken portion of the trail. There was good footing on the other side and the path continued on up the mountain as far as he could see its tortuous windings. Could the mare leap the cut? Ted Randall's heart pounded as he considered the possibility. If the ground had offered a better foothold—and the mare was fresh—perhaps. If she didn't make it—Ted looked over the edge and fought down the panic that swept over him. He leaned his head against the mare's shoulder for an instant before he mounted.

"Old girl," he murmured, with a break threatening in his voice. "You got to make it. You got to!"

Ted rode her up to the lip of the cut, talking to her all the while. The mare shook her head nervously, but when he turned her back along the trail only to turn around again, she seemed to know what was demanded of her.

When Ted touched her lightly with the spurs, she stretched out at once in a long stride, thundering up the trail without hesitation. The mare reached the edge and Ted felt the muscles bunch as she launched herself out over the gap. The wind sang briefly in Ted's ears. For a moment, he hung in space and time seemed to stop until the mare's hoofs struck with a terrific ringing clatter on the far side of the cut. One hind hoof didn't clear and horse and rider lurched backward before the mare finally made it to safety.

TED dismounted and ran his hand over her hind legs, to see if she was badly hurt. Both legs were skinned, but neither badly. There were tears in Ted's eyes as he hugged the mare's quivering head.

"Lordy, girl! Lordy! What a jump!" Ted vaulted into the saddle and urged the mare into a trot up the winding path, a new confidence in the set of his shoulders. Only a desperate man would attempt to put a horse over that cut. Of this, Ted was certain.

When he reached the crest of the trail,

Ted rode on for a few yards, snubbed the reins to a shrub and wormed his way up to a point of vantage where he could view the cut.

It was not long before Ted caught a glimpse of a white speck on the thread-like trail below. When it next appeared, it was larger. The sheriff was not far behind. Ted watched as the stallion stopped at the cut. The sheriff dismounted, as Ted had done, and appeared to muse over the break. Then the lawman mounted and turned the stallion back on the trail. Ted's breath escaped from his lungs in a relieved whistle, only to groan helplessly as the sheriff reined the stallion in and spurred him toward the cut.

The white horse cleared the break with an ease that made Ted's face sink to the earth in despair. He was up in an instant, stumbling a little as he scrambled down to the mare and swug into the saddle. Now, he urged the mare into a headlong gallop, where the trail permitted.

As Ted descended into the foothills, he rode with his chin on his shoulder, constantly on the watch for the sheriff to appear behind him. As his back trail became obscured by the rolling hills and evening shadows, Ted fought down some of the tension that was weakening and draining his body of strength. He camped late that night, knowing the sheriff would be forced to halt and aware that the mare had to have the rest.

Ted slept little and was up before daylight. He ate raw strips of bacon and a cold biscuit in the saddle. All morning, he was forced to fight down the panic that made him want to spur the mare to a headlong pace.

Then, late in the afternoon, the speck appeared. Despair welled up in Ted and made him slump in the saddle. The mare stopped and turned her head inquiringly. Ted started to spur her savagely and then his face softened.

The mare seemed to understand the urgency in her master's voice. She went forward again at a brisk trot, but Ted's heart skipped a beat and his stomach tightened as he noticed the slight hesitation that had entered her stride. His mouth thinned to a narrow line as the afternoon wore into night and he was forced to camp again.

That night, Ted tossed sleeplessly. There was no moon and the darkness pressed in

from every side. Every sound brought him sitting upright and his heart would race madly until he identified it. He wondered if the mare would stand up another day.

The mare didn't. The next afternoon, Sheriff Brooks reined in his big, white stallion at the boulder strewn entrance to a canyon, threw a careless leg around the saddle pommel and pulled tobacco and papers from a shirt pocket. He made a cigarette carefully, while the stallion hung a weary head. After the lawman had licked the paper fast, he said conversationally, apparently to the empty expanse of hills.

"Son, you and me better have a little get-together."

Sheriff Brooks sat silently in his saddle, his keen eyes expressionless as he took in the young man's haggard face, red rimmed eyes and the .45 dangling limply from the other's hand.

"Whyn't you shoot?" he asked, a trifle grimly.

Ted Randall raised dull eyes. "I couldn't," he said wearily. He stumbled forward and tried to hand the gun to the sheriff.

"I don't want it," the old lawman said testily.

Ted looked at him in astonishment, his eyes dazed and uncomprehending.

"You aren't going to take me in?" he asked huskily.

Sheriff Brooks snorted. "I don't know what for," he grumbled moodily. "Unless it's for being a damned fool!"

Ted stared blankly at him for a moment. "Then you know I didn't kill Stanford," he said at last.

The old lawman snorted again. "Didn't even know he was dead," he said sourly. "The last I seen him, he was cussin' to high heaven—tellin' what he'd do to you and Ozzie Twiggs if either of you ever come back to town again. Not that I place much stock in his promises," he added wryly.

Ted Randall sat down weakly, the gun still in his hand, forgotten. Sheriff Brooks eyed him a while.

"I found the bottle you emptied before the scrap," he said at last, "So for your general edification, I'll tell you what happened. Miles didn't even almost say you shot him. Ozzie shot him with your gun—carving a big gash across Stanford's ribs.

Stanford wasn't hurt bad, but he was plumb scared, so he just played possum. Who put you up to jumping Miles?" he demanded of Ted.

The lawman nodded when Ted looked up with a start. Ted dropped his head again without answering, but the sheriff nodded grimly.

"I figured it was Fox Frazier. Well, he'd better be out of town when we get back. Where's the mare? She all right?"

"Yes," the boy said dazedly. "I stopped when she started to give out. I tied her up in the canyon."

"Wonder you didn't kill her," growled the lawman. "She hasn't got the legs for the trail you took."

"Why'd you come after me?" Ted asked him, bewilderedly.

Sheriff Brooks stared at him sourly. "You got a mighty nice looking sister," he reminded him. "Dunno how she'd look with gray hair though."

"You have no idea how—how it was—running away like that," Ted said huskily. "Always looking back, hearing noises in the night—and then each day think I'd shook you off and I was safe—and then seeing you behind me. You don't know how awful that was!"

The weathered lines in the lawman's face softened a little as he looked down at the earnest young face.

"Well, son," he said at last, softly. "I wouldn't want it to get around especially, but I had a little experience like that once."

"You did?" Ted asked, his eyes widening.

"Yep," the growl was back in the sheriff's voice. "I give myself up—same's you did." He paused and then added more thoughtfully. "Some like the lonesome trail and some don't. I didn't."

Ted shuddered. "I didn't either!" he admitted. "Lordy!" he said, looking up into the sheriff's face again. "Lordy, am I glad you caught up with me!"

Sheriff Brooks was suddenly seized by an aggravating cough. When it finally subsided, he told Ted to go get the mare and they'd go back to the last stream and camp, to let the horses rest. He saw no point in telling young Randall that a dozen times in the last three days, he had stopped and waited patiently, while he got a fresh start.

By
W. F.
Bragg

Nonchalantly, he
leaned over and
poured the scalding
coffee into the man's
boot.



Omaha Eddie Gets Hot

JOE DOGAN, alias the Lone Wolf, glared through the barred slot in the door of the dugout that served as the Trigger Creek jail. His eyes centered on the mild looking little man, wearing a hard hat, plaid suit, linen duster, and tooth-pick pointed shoes, who stood gingerly beside old Luke Suggs, the camp law.

"This camp calls you a hero for roundin'

The intrepid little insurance drummer figured he'd never find a better prospect than the Lone Wolf. But that jail-busting badman swore that the best policy was one signed in the blood of one pint-sized greenhorn insurance peddler.

me up," Joe Dogan sneered. "But you and me know it was just dumb luck. When I get outa here—"

"—Which'll be in the sweet pretty soon," put in old Luke.

"—There'll be one less prune and insurance drummer infestin' the sagebrush."

"Listen, Joe," Luke said sternly, "Omaha Eddie, here, never set hisself up as a hero. But when the play came around to where he could put the deadwood on you, he picked up his cards and played out his hand like a man."

Joe's lank-jawed face turned as red as a slab of sirloin.

"This game ain't played out yet, Luke. I don't like your calaboose. It smells like raw pertaters and sulphur matches. It's alive with flies."

"I sent you and Fat Jack some fly paper yesterday. Aim to keep jailbirds happy until old judge comes along with his jury."

"Damn your judge and jury! I'm gettin' outta here. When I do, that butter-eyed little cracker peddler better be long gone."

Luke drew and held up his gun. "Any funny move you make, Joe, you're apt to meet *this* jury. Six full, and apt to be discharged any minute."

"Bah!" snarled the Lone Wolf. "Guns don't worry me none."

"If it wasn't fer a demand in this camp for law and order, you'd have attended a necktie party right after Eddie, here, rounded you up. Now you go over and bed down along with Fat Jack. Me and Eddie will tote in your breakfast."

Hearing his name, Fat Jack came to the door. He was a paunchy party from the forks of Chugwater, in jail from the effects of too many other people's cattle. He looked at Luke with sorrow written on his beefy face. At the same time, he held up a pair of saddle-soft overalls and ran a finger through a hole in the seat.

"I ain't complainin' none like Joe," he said. "Mebbe I'm lucky the law beat the stranglers to me. But you got a big block of yaller stuff over in a dark corner. I sat down on it yesterday. When I got up, danged if there wasn't holes in the seat of my levis like I'd sat down on red hot coals."

Luke nodded. "I shoulda told you about that yaller stuff, Jack. It's a block of native sulphur I brought in fer a specimen from the mines out in the galena district. Found **out it had too much acid in it. Plumb p'izen**

when it gets wet. Burns like fire. Reg'lar brimstone. Figgered to throw it away but fergot. Rained some yesterday. Reckon water leaked down from the roof on it."

"I can't face no judge and jury with the seat of my pants out. That would be contempt."

"If you're facin' old judge, he won't see the seat of your pants, Jack. However, I'll bring you a fresh pair with your breakfast. Now you two boys act nice."

But as Luke led Eddie down the path toward his store, the Lone Wolf shouted, "I know that fake hero signed you up for heavy insurance sugar. Double damages if you die accidental-like." The Lone Wolf laughed. "I figure to make you the poorest insurance risk in these hills, Luke."

Back in the rear of the store which served as kitchen, banking room, and Luke's boudoir, the old man poked up breakfast sputtering on the stove. Eddie started to seat himself on a dark block of wood in the corner. Luke halted him with a loud yell.

"That's brimstone!" Luke shouted. "Same stuff Jack sat down on. I got a silver mine back in Brimstone Basin. Found some of this stuff. Brought some out for specimens. Figured I might find a market. It's got some sorta acid in it that burns like fire when it's wet. Look." He broke off a chunk of sulphur, crumbled it into a pan, added water, then dipped an end of the dish rag into the mixture. The fabric turned yellow and parted as though it had been scorched.

"Stuff makes dangerous fumes, too," added Luke. "Out in that mine I've opened, in wet weather, when air's heavy and damp, I've found birds and little animals dead around the tunnel mouth. Shore dangerous stuff. Reckon it 'ud burn a man's flesh same as his clothin'."

Eddie wiped off his brow. Even a man's trousers weren't safe in Trigger Creek. He had signed Luke up with the Eagle Insurance Company for a nice life, double indemnity policy. Perhaps now was the time to drift out of these mountains.

"The Lone Wolf's right," he said. "I'm not a hero. Plain dumb luck helped me to pinch the Lone Wolf and find your bank roll."

Less than a month before, while riding Absalom Bower's mail stage to Trigger Creek on a wholesale grocery and insurance

selling trip, Eddie had been one of the victims of a holdup staged by the Lone Wolf. Escaping with a large sum of money intended for Luke's bank, the outlaw had not believed the meek little drummer would follow him. But Eddie had pursued. In the encounter that followed, the Lone Wolf ran Eddie headlong into a morose grizzly bear for a laugh. The bear turned on the Lone Wolf and treed him. Eddie had wit enough to grab the gun which the Lone Wolf dropped, capture the man and recover the money.

"Don't be scairt of that four flushin' Lone Wolf," said Luke. "He's talkin' to save his face. You made your mark in these hills. You stick around. Me signin' one of your policies has set you up with the boys. You're on the road to success."

THAT cheered Eddie. He had come west to carve out success by hard work. A starry-eyed girl in the home office hesitated between Eddie and a brash young sales manager. Perhaps his gallantry in capturing the outlaw and winning Luke's friendship would tilt the scales of love in his favor. However, he knew the Lone Wolf could shoot straight. In that hold-up he had put a slug through the right arm of Dave Judd, express messenger, esteemed as the fastest snapshot in the Rockies. Dave and Absalom Bower, because of the shooting and the hold up, had also lost caste in the hills. Neither regarded Eddie as a hero but as a tenderfoot endowed with dumb luck.

"Absalom and Dave'll be in about noon with the mail," said Luke. "They'll help guard the jail tonight. All I'm askin' is for you to help me tote breakfast up to them skunks. You carry the tray. I'll pack a gun. Nuthin'll go wrong."

The camp lacked manpower in midsummer, with most of the boys away on their claims. So Luke had requested for Eddie's aid. Since the timid insurance man had signed up the old man for ten thousand dollars, it seemed but a small service. Eddie's success with Luke might bring a flood of business which would definitely bring the starry-eyed Omaha girl swooning into his arms.

He pulled up his plaid pants, planted his little hard hat firmly on his round head, and said valiantly, "I'll do what I can, Luke."

The old man handed him a tray. "Put the coffee pot and breakfast on this," he

said. "I'll go out in the store and rustle Fat Jack a pair of overalls. About size fifty four. Can't let no Trigger Cricker face the mills of jestic without a decent pair of pants."

Cheerfully Eddie ladled hot oatmeal from a steamer and put on the tray with a platter of sourdough hotcakes, the battered coffee pot, tin cups, plates and other eating utensils. Luke returned with a pair of overalls.

"Big enough," he growled, "to decorate an elephant."

He kicked the block of brimstone. "Got to move this stuff outta the way. No profit in pervidin' the jail, then standin' good for pants fer miscreants like Fat Jack. Come on, Eddie."

The summer sun was shining cheerily as the two departed from the kitchen. Sniffing the fragrant odor of hot coffee, it seemed to Eddie that his fears of what the Lone Wolf might do were ridiculous. Old Luke's gun looked as big as a cannon. He could shoot straight, too.

Then a cloud briefly hid the sun and Eddie thought of the hate in the Lone Wolf's eyes as he had glared through the slot in the door. He was a crafty fellow. Suppose that somehow he got the gun away from Luke. What chance would a meek little drummer have then?

The two started up the pathway toward the dugout, Eddie carrying the tray, Luke with his gun. The old man heard the rattle of tin cups and knew Eddie's hands were shaking.

"Buck up, my lad," he said genially. "Don't let the Lone Wolf throw and hogtie yuh. Remember what that insurance company's always tellin' its agents. Fly high. Be alert. Size up prospects carefully. Then sign 'em up."

"Since I came west," said Eddie, "they've also told me to take chances. Run risks. Win by the skin of my teeth if necessary."

"The skin of yore teeth," laughed Luke. "Those boys in yore home office are plumb darin' where other men have to run risks."

Luke shouted through the slot as he unlocked the jail door.

"You two in there! Stand back against the wall. Or you don't get no breakfast."

With the order obeyed, Luke motioned Eddie to enter with the tray. He followed, hard eyes on Joe and Jack who stood against the side wall not far from the table.

"Don't make nary a fancy move," Luke cautioned. He nodded toward Eddie and the tray. "New overalls for Fat Jack to wear to court."

Jack had draped his legs in a dingy red blanket. He looked properly grateful. But Joe Dogan snarled and cursed the jail accommodations.

"Listen," Luke bristled, "you don't deserve no better treatment than a hog. But us Trigger Crickers have tried to give you good quarters and grub. What's the matter?"

"Listen to them flies buzzin'. The damn fly paper you sent me don't catch 'em. Ain't sticky enough. They go for it like it was sorghum larrup, take a couple good licks then fly away plumb satisfied."

Eddie broke in indignantly. "My firm sells that fly paper. It's guaranteed."

"A fake," jeered Dogan. "Just like you. Plumb fake." He stepped toward the center table.

"Stand back," Luke warned.

"I don't aim to jump you, yuh bald-headed ol' rooster. Table's between us. Just aim to prove what I say about this fly paper's right. Flies won't stick to it. Look." He reached the table and faced Luke across its battered top. Eddie stood at the end near the doorway, tray still held at chin level. Fat Jack lazed against the wall, clinging modestly to the blanket.

"Look," said the Lone Wolf, and bending over the table, he spread a strip of fly paper between his hands. "Look. Here comes a big fly. Watch an' see if it stops him. No—"

"I don't see no fly," growled Luke. He bent over the table, narrowing his eyes. "You're lyin', Joe. Misrepresentin' my merchandise. That paper's sticky enough to catch flies. Sticky enough—"

"You said it!" Joe yelled, and clapped the fly paper to Luke's face. Blinded, the furious old man let go with his gun. Its roar made the walls jump. As he plastered the paper over Luke's bony face, the Lone Wolf deftly side-stepped out of bullet range. He kicked over the table and shoved it against Luke as the jailor pawed frantically at bits of paper covering his eyes.

Startled, Eddie stood rooted in his tracks for an instant. His first impulse was to turn and flee. But Luke had locked the door after their entrance. He couldn't escape. He must stay and fight. Even time

to put his back in a corner was denied him. He saw the Lone Wolf grab Luke and reach for the old man's gun. At the same time, the outlaw yelled, "Jack—take care of the hero!"

With shirt tail flying, Fat Jack cast himself at Eddie's throat. Eddie whirled to meet his rush. He started to lower the tray. Deftly, for a paunchy man, Fat Jack kicked the tray. A shower of hot coffee and smoking oatmeal geysered up into Eddie's face.

Blindly, Eddie flung the tray at his attacker. What remained of the coffee in the pot scalded Jack's chubby face. But he bored in although he raised a yell of anguish. He cracked a hard punch off Eddie's chin. The little drummer reeled backwards and fell over the table. As he sought to rise, Fat Jack drove him back with a flying tackle. The back of Eddie's head hit the hard floor. His wits fuzzed up. He felt the blood drain out of his legs. Still he attempted to fight. Fat Jack's weight bore him down. He heard the Lone Wolf's high-pitched yell.

"Ride him, Jack! I got the gun!"

Jack rode Eddie as though the latter were a fresh young bronc. He worked on his ribs with knees and hammered Eddie's face with rock-hard fists. The fight went out of Eddie. He stretched out, half stunned, dimly telling himself that he should never have lingered in Trigger Creek to sign up old Luke.

Clunk! The Lone Wolf slapped old Luke above the right ear with six inches of gun barrel, caught the old man as he faded out, gently lowered him to the floor beside Eddie. Fat Jack looked up worriedly. "You goin' to beef 'em?" he asked. Jack was a simple cow thief. He would stand for a jail break. But he didn't fancy murder. Ropes were too long in Trigger Creek for killers and Fat Jack knew it.

The Lone Wolf stared down at the two men on the floor. He scratched his raspy shock of black hair with the front sight of Luke's gun. He was thinking deeply. Then he showed his big yellow teeth in a grin.

"I aimed to kill 'em," he said. "But I got a better idea. You an' me'll put the laugh on Trigger Creek for buildin' this prune peddler into a hero. Tie him up, Jack, with what's left of your old overalls. Then get into the pair Luke brought yuh. You an' me are takin' the old man with us when we leave town."

SHORTLY after noon, Absalom Bower invaded the dugout and freed Eddie. His spade-shaped beard quivered indignantly as he rushed the drummer to Luke's store. The office was a wreck. The door of the safe hung open, revealing an empty interior.

"Dave's gone to get hosses!" roared Absalom. "The Lone Wolf and Fat Jack not only got away with Luke but they cracked the combination off the safe and took the bank roll. No time to wait for help. Me and Dave's hittin' the trail. And takin' you along as a prisoner."

"Prisoner?" gasped Eddie. "Why do you call me a prisoner?"

"Read this," snapped Absalom, thrusting a bit of paper into Eddie's hands. The message, signed by the Lone Wolf ran:

"You'll find your hero in the jug. He helped us get away if we'd cut him in on the bank roll. But after he'd slipped us a gun and the key, we figured we'd leave him for the camp to keep on worshipin'. We're takin' Luke along. You crowd us too close and you may not see him again—alive."

"Listen," Eddie pleaded, "that's the Lone Wolf's idea of a laugh. Just gettin' even with me because I got the deadwood on him once."

"We're takin' no chances on you. Only way of provin' you're straight is to help us rescue Luke and the bank roll."

Dave Judd stuck his head in the door shouting that the outlaws had stolen all the horses in Absalom's corral excepting Dynamite, the buckskin pack mule.

"Even got the old white bell mare of your pack train," said Dave. "Figured to set us afoot."

"We're not afoot!" roared Absalom. "Unhook the two teams from the mail coach, Dave. I'll hustle some saddles outa the barn. We can throw a bedroll and some grub on the mule, case we camp out all night."

A glary-eyed sorrel of the lead team was turned over to Eddie. Absalom flung riding gear at his feet.

"These team hosses are broke to ride," he explained, "but they ain't been topped for months. Might pitch some. That sorrel's flighty without blinders on the bridle. Don't worry, though. He's been druv forty miles today. When you get on, just hold up his head."

"Listen," said Eddie, "I never rode

much. In fact, I never rode any except a horse in a merry-go-round."

"Don't try to squirm outta this!" snarled Absalom. "Saddle up that sorrel."

Sorrowfully, Eddie obeyed. The sorrel looked around once or twice as the little man smoothed out blanket then heaved up the saddle. After the cinch had been drawn up, Eddie stepped back to consider his work. Somehow it didn't appear quite correct. Absalom and Dave led up their horses and the mule.

"By Hell!" roared Absalom. "Tryin' to delay us!"

"Delay you?"

"Yeah. Look at that saddle. You got it on backwards!"

Eddie lost his temper. "Backwards nothing," he yelled. "How do you know which way I'm going?"

Absalom batted his eyes, gulped like a fish out of water, then, wordlessly, resaddled the sorrel.

"Now," he ordered, "don't try any more tricks. Me an' Dave are packin' guns."

"Why don't you give me a gun?"

"You? We ain't trustin' you after what the Lone Wolf wrote."

Absalom mounted, wrapped the mule's lead rope around his saddle horn. Dave, hampered by a slightly wounded right arm, mark of the Lone Wolf's bullet, got into leather. Eddie watched them, gathered up the reins tightly as they did, thrust toe into stirrup, rose grandly into the air.

The sorrel cast one worried glance about, snorted, shot past Absalom and Dave at full gallop before they could interfere.

"Come back here!" yelled Absalom. "Don't try to escape!"

"The dang galoot got into the saddle on the wrong side," barked Dave. "Scairt the sorrel!"

They clattered after Eddie. He gripped reins and saddle horn in a death clutch as the sorrel bore him through an alley, across sagebrush back lots, jumped a barbed wire fence as gracefully as a buck deer, and settled down for a long run toward the distant Buckskin Mountains.

Only the arrival of Dave Judd halted the stampeder. Dave spurred in front of the sorrel. He rode the animal's team mate. Seeing that here was a friend, the sorrel immediately slowed to a road jog, so abruptly that Eddie almost pitched from the saddle.

Absalom Bower arrived, leading the buckskin mule. Rawhide pack kyacks pounding its ribs. Absalom flourished his gun.

"Next time you try to run away!" he threatened, "I'll blow off your head."

"I wasn't runnin' away. I am as anxious as you to rescue poor old Luke. He's my friend. Also—he's signed up for a life insurance policy with my company. First I've wrote up in these hills. If he gets killed, his estate collects double. Now put up that gun and let's all act sensible."

Dave Judd, taking a chew of tobacco, opined that maybe Eddie was telling the truth.

"That sorrel's nitwitted," he said. "Run away at any excuse." He motioned toward the mule. "Bad as Dynamite there. He's crazy about that old white bell mare. Foller her to hell and back if he gets on her tracks. We got to watch him if we come up close on the Lone Wolf."

Higher in the hills, they cut the Lone Wolf's sign. Dave pushed ahead as scout. Absalom followed, leading the mule. Eddie brought up the rear, handling the sorrel cautiously. They trailed through a grove of slender quaker trees. Dave started across a grassy clearing. Suddenly he halted, motioned to Absalom.

"Here," said Absalom thrusting the mule's leadrope into Eddie's hand, "you come along slow. I'll see what Dave wants."

He rattled across the clearing. Eddie followed, mule trotting docilely at the end of the rope. A leaf fluttered in the trail. The skittish sorrel shied. The mule, stepping out of the pathway, cut back to the trail again. In doing so, it jogged between two quaker saplings. The distance wasn't wide enough to permit passage of the pack sacks. Dynamite stuck between the trees. The more Eddie hauled and pleaded, the more earnestly the mule struggled to free itself, but without avail. Eddie glanced despairingly ahead. Absalom and Dave had gone on, disappearing into another stand of timber.

He slipped from the saddle. As he turned back to free the mule, the wind fluttered his linen duster. Startled, the sorrel swung about, blinked its white eyes, then crashed down the trail, speeding back toward Trigger Creek.

Absalom and Dave, hearing the rattle of the sorrel through the trees, returned on

the run. Dave rolled his spurs, speeded after the runaway horse. Absalom, in a bitter silence, helped Eddie to extricate the mule. Dave returned with the report that he could not overtake the sorrel.

"Let's just tie this prune peddler to a tree until we come back," he suggested.

"No," growled Absalom, "he stays with us."

"Nothing to ride except the mule. And Dynamite ain't broke to ridin'."

"This is where he gets broke," said Absalom, "Strip him down to the pack saddle."

"Listen, boys," Eddie pleaded, regarding the mule, "just tie me to a tree for the night."

"You're goin' with us!" bawled Absalom. "And no more tricks to delay us."

The mule stood waiting, switching its tail and flopping its ears. Dynamite was a gentle beast, with no cares in the world except a fondness for oats and the old white bell mare. Pushed on by Absalom, while Dave held the mule's head, Eddie approached. The mule sidled off as he laid hand on the wooden pack saddle.

"Whoa!" shouted Absalom and Dave as one man. But the mule wouldn't stand to be mounted.

"We're losin' time," said Dave. "Let's tie this pilgrim to that big cottonwood tree over there."

"No. We're takin' him with us."

"We can't get him on the mule."

Absalom frowned. "There's a low limb on that tree. Lead the mule under it." He turned sternly on Eddie. "You climb up to that limb. We'll lead the mule under. I'll count three. Then you drop down on the mule's back."

"Listen," Eddie began. But Absalom showed him his gun. So Eddie swarmed up the cottonwood and out along the limb. Here he balanced himself while Dave led the mule beneath him.

"Three!" shouted Absalom. "Drop!"

Eddie obeyed. He settled as lightly as a bird upon Dynamite's broad back. He gathered up the reins. Suddenly aroused by the feeling of weight on his back, Dynamite looked around. He saw Eddie's long narrow black shoes nuzzling him in the withers. Perhaps Dynamite thought they were snakes attacking him. His long ears tensed. Dynamite began to run.

"Whoa!" Dave and Absalom yelled in

unision. But Dynamite was just getting started.

Eddie tried to turn and yell that the mule wouldn't whoa. At every jump, Dynamite gained speed. He was a thoroughly alarmed mule. At every stride he swung his head to left or right. Each time he saw those dangling shoes that pounded his ribs. Appalled at such a burden, Dynamite let out another notch of speed. A gun cracked in the rear. A slug whined past Eddie's head. This was serious. They thought he was escaping. They were trying to kill him. He laid back on the reins. He sawed with all his strength. Dynamite only gripped the bit tighter.

Another shot. Eddie never heard the passage of the bullet.

"Gosh," he thought, "this darn mule's outrun it."

HE MEDITATED falling off but Dynamite was now rushing across rocky ground. A fall might mean a broken neck or back. Better to hang and rattle until weariness overcame this buckskin demon. Dynamite, even in his terror, stayed to the trail with a mule's sagacity, galloped across a wide stream, hurling high the icy water. Soaked to the skin, Eddie hung in chattering misery.

He heard no sound of pursuit behind him. The sun was low behind the timbered Buckskins in the west. Night was coming on. Back in Omaha, they were just locking up the home office and going home to comfortable, safe suppers. Perhaps the starry-eyed girl was going with the sales manager. Tears came to Eddie's eyes. Would he ever again see good old Omaha and the girl? Or would this mule run on forever?

As though in answer to Eddie's unvoiced prayer, Dynamite slowed suddenly to a jog. He thrust out his blunt muzzle and emitted a hoarse bray. Ahead, jogging up the trail, Eddie saw an old white horse.

Overtaking the white horse, which bore the marks of hard going, the mule settled down to a slow canter. This amazed Eddie. Then he recalled Dave's remark about this mule being fond of an old white bell mare which had been stolen from Absalom's corral. This horse, apparently, was the object of the mule's affections. Tiring from the stiff pace set by the outlaws, she had apparently been dropped along the trail in the hope that she would return to town.

Now Eddie could slide off the mule's back, await the arrival of Absalom and Dave. But why wait? Why not trudge southward through the mountains, cut the railroad line, buy a ticket to Omaha? He owed nothing to Absalom or Dave. The Lone Wolf would certainly kill him if he happened to reach his hiding place. There was an old saying about living to run away and fight another day. Well, this was a good day to run away. Away from this land where even a man's pants weren't safe from destruction.

The sun sank like a ball of fire behind the ragged Buckskins. A faint taint stung Eddie's nostrils, recalling the odor of the block of brimstone in Luke's kitchen. The mine, from whence it came, must be nearby. The mine in Brimstone Basin. Brimstone was also called hell's fire. Eddie shivered and prepared to roll off the mule.

Dynamite ambled along at the old mare's heels. Apparently she didn't return his adoration for she lashed out suddenly with her hind legs. Dynamite dodged, flapped his ears apologetically, returned trustfully to the trail. Dave had said the mule would blindly follow the old bell mare.

The ground rose in a long slope that led to a yellow skyline. The mare halted, flung up her head, nickered. From the top of the hill came an answer. They had cut her out hoping she would return to town but she had faithfully followed her friends of the feed corral.

Somewhere along that divide, the outlaws had made their night camp. Eddie knew that he must slide off the mule and escape before the Long Wolf bent a gun on him.

The mare increased her limping jog to a full gallop. Dynamite followed suit. Now was the time. Then Eddie thought of an old man up there, prisoner of the bandits, the man who had esteemed him as a man of courage and wit. Few men had ever rated Omaha Eddie so highly. The thought fired up his tired heart, warmed his shaking hands, made him reflect that the Eagle had bade him run risks, win out by the skin of his teeth. He carried no arms but while life remained, there was hope.

At headlong speed, the old mare galloped toward her picketed companions, Dynamite, rattling along, full tilt at her heels. Eddie hung to the saddle, bouncing around like a rubber ball. The mare reached the grazing

horses. She halted abruptly. Dynamite dug his hoofs into the stony earth. Eddie was flung over his head, the length of the bridle reins.

As he lay there, stunned, he heard a yell of alarm. Then an amazed laugh.

"Jack, it's that insurance peddler. Tryin' out some more of his dumb luck. Go out an' bring him down here!"

Fat Jack dragged Eddie down into a dismal hole in the earth. It stank abominably of sulphur fumes. Water, from a recent mountain rainstorm, had settled in a low spot in the yellow floor. Over a small fire crouched the Lone Wolf. He was boiling a pot of coffee.

"Tie him up, Jack," he growled. "After we eat we'll take care of both of 'em. Too much trouble to take 'em with us. We'll just roll 'em both into the old mine. Sulphur fumes'll finish 'em."

"I hate to cut a good rope," Jack objected.

"Tie his hands behind him with your bandanna."

Jack obeyed. Then he hauled Eddie to his feet and kicked him across the pit to a dark corner. Eddie landed alongside Luke who was propped against the wet wall, bound, hand and foot, with stout hemp.

"This is it," the old man said faintly. "The Wolf was right. I'm a poor risk. Before long my estate will be richer by twenty thousand dollars of your Eagle firm's cash but we won't be here to spend it."

Eddie wriggled to his feet and lurched toward the tunnel. The Lone Wolf leaped up, flourishing a gun.

"Sit down," he commanded. "No fancy tricks."

"I—I just wanted to look down that hole," whispered Eddie. "Where—where you aim to bury me and Luke."

"Go ahead and look," the Lone Wolf laughed.

Eddie sniffed the odors rising from the shaft. He sank down in the pool of water.

"He's ready to faint," jeered the Lone Wolf. "Plumb scairt. One hell of a hero."

Eddie staggered to his feet.

"Give me a drink of that hot coffee before I go under," he pleaded.

Fat Jack pushed the pot toward him mockingly. The Lone Wolf jeered, "Drink some. If you *can*. With your hands tied."

Something spurred Eddie to action, something that burnt like the sudden touch of a branding iron. As he sprang toward the Lone Wolf, he thrust out his arms. The bandanna scarf, which had confined his hands, burst.

Old Luke raised a yell. "Go to it, Eddie! Never quit without a fight!"

Eddie's attack amazed and rattled the Lone Wolf. He snarled a vicious question at staring Fat Jack as the little drummer wrapped both arms around his waist and sought to drag him down.

The Lone Wolf attempted to club down Eddie with his sixgun barrel. Fat Jack leaped in, hoping to kick in Eddie's ribs. The drummer's groping hand, jarred loose from its death hold, encountered the coffee pot. The Lone Wolf wore knee-high boots.

Without more ado, Eddie poured the hot java down the Lone Wolf's right boot.

In agony, the outlaw began a war dance around the pit while Fat Jack stood by, with a stupid gaze on his beefy face. Eddie staggered up. He gave Jack the pot and what remained of the coffee, directly in his wide open mouth.

A rifle leaned against the wall. Eddie reached it. He cut down on the Lone Wolf as the latter sought wildly to jerk off his boot. Fat Jack was out of the fight, blindly clawing coffee grounds out of his eyes.

"You can call it dumb luck," Eddie quavered. "But before me and Luke go down that hole. I'll try out this gun on you."

That wound up the battle. Fat Jack, under the urging of the gun, released old Luke. It was not difficult then to tie up the outlaws in the rope which held Luke.

"Don't take no chances on tyin' them up with cloth," Eddie warned. "Remember this is the brimstone pit. It eats away cloth. I figured that out. Sat down in a pool of water which had settled on the stuff. Hoped it would eat the cloth off my wrists. It sure did. Even went deeper than that. Ruefully, he felt the rear of his pants."

Old Luke laughed. "Didn't your company order you to run risks, win out by the skin of your teeth?"

"Yes," said Eddie.

"Boy—you shore foller orders. You even go beyond 'em. You won out today, not only by the skin of your teeth. But, by gosh, the seat of your pants."



Shawville was doomed, for the new westering steel trail pointed straight for New Chance. Matt Quayle, two-fisted, trouble-shooting engineer, took his last, longshot gamble, to bring prosperity to the stricken town—or to drag down, in crashing, crimson ruin, the hopes and lives of the neighbors who trusted him.

78

CHAPTER ONE

Death-Rattle of a Town

THE ruckus started half a block from the stage station. Matt Quayle turned to look; so did the other passengers waiting for the horses to be

Boss of



By Giff Cheshire

changed. Quayle saw three men circling a fourth, taking turns in rushing him. He took the stogie from his lips and tossed it into the red dust. A craggy man of thirty-two, he moved up the walk with a deceitful leisure. The other passengers stood fast, for the stage was about ready to go on, and anyhow it was none of their concern. But any long-odds proposition was a challenge to Matt Quayle.

He saw that the defender was young, tall, lank and unafraid as he took their beating. Quayle noted one of the attackers was a big and handsome man with wiry

sideburns and slick hair and the two who were a typical pair of hardcases. They made it easy, one rushing in to tie the victim up while the others slugged. Quayle stepped into it instinctively, flowing into swift, smooth action. He grabbed a pair by the scuff of the neck and banged heads with enough force to send them reeling when he let go.

"There, kid!" Quayle yelled to the lone battler. "You got better working conditions!"

The dude stepped back hastily, glaring at Quayle. His hand dipped under his lapel and came out with a gun in it. There was an explosion, and it dropped into the dust. Quayle blew into the barrel of his

Damnation Dam

own gun and grinned. The youngster looked surprised, but pleased. The dude clutched his gun hand to his chest, looking stunned.

"Lost your nerve, Wilkins?" the string-bean kid taunted. "Let's finish it!"

The dapper Wilkins eyed Quayle with pure malice. "Let it go, Shaw. But meddling gunswifts or no, you'll get what's coming if you lay a hand on that sign." He picked up his gun, motioned to his men and stalked down the street.

Quayle took a look at the sign Wilkins indicated, which stood on a vacant lot at the intersection. Across the top was a big painted arrow pointing up the side street, under which was a provocative message:

"Come to New Chance! Locate along the new railroad! Boone Basin is dead and the fertile acres of Buckle Flats beckon you! Follow the arrows!"

As this town was called Shawville, Quayle could see some of the reason for the battle he had interrupted. The freshly turned earth around the sign post showed it had just been put there.

"Wilkins is trying to take settlers away from Shawville, huh?"

Shaw nodded. "They just put it there, and I come over to cuss 'em out. I run that store across the street, like my pa ahead of me. I figure I got a say here. This railroad mentioned there ain't even built yet. So settlers follow the old stage road and hit Shawville first. They like it around here, and most of 'em stay, in spite of the promoters Wilkins has had working over here. I'm danged if I'm going to keep looking at that sign all day."

"Whose land is it on?"

"The lot belongs to the bank. That danged Ingram Travis has got a silver-plated heart. I think he's even putting money into New Chance, and they say he's even going to move his bank over there. And Nora—" Shaw blushed. "—she's his daughter, sir—she's even tried to talk me into moving my store over. That, I claim, is a hell of a note just because Shawville got by-passed by the new railroad."

"If it isn't built yet, how do you know you've been by-passed?"

"It's surveyed, sir, and a lot of the right-of-way's bought."

At that moment the stage driver sang out from down the street. "You going with us, mister?"

Quayle stroked his big, square jaw. "Toss out my valise. I'm making a stop-over."

The driver shrugged and obliged. Young Shaw had an apologetic look of protest on his lean, good-looking face. "I sure appreciate your help, mister, but I don't want to put you out. I can handle 'em, if they come back."

Quayle grinned. "It isn't that, boy. I'm just taking a look-see in these parts. This might be a good place to take it from. Tell me something. What've they got over on Buckle Flats that outshines Boone Basin, besides the promise of a railroad?"

"Well, Wilkins is making a point out of how we flood every winter, then go bone dry summers. This was stock country in Dad's day. It's a fact the nesters who've been settling around here ain't made out so good. But the summers're just as hot on Buckle Flats, even if they don't get the floods. What's your name, mister?"

"Quayle. Matt Quayle."

Shaw stared at him. "Not the big construction man?"

"Reckon so. In fact, I come up this way looking for a nice stretch on the new railroad to sub-contract. What do your friends call you, Shaw?"

"Lew."

"See you later, Lew."

They shook hands, and Quayle turned down the street. He carried his grip over to the hotel and registered. Later, as he freshened up in his room, he grinned to himself. Given to unpredictable moves, he sensed that he was going to find interest in this country without being too clear on what it would be or why he had stayed over. The new railroad was building down around Center City now, and this section was only in the projection stage.

Quayle went out onto the street again presently and cut a slant over to Lew Shaw's mercantile. Shaw was talking to a pretty girl, and Quayle waited, idly studying a display of fishing tackle but really watching the young pair. Lew was tinged red to his ear tips, and it was obvious that he was hopelessly in love with this cool, rather haughty bundle of femininity. The girl took her small purchase and left, and the young merchant stared after her for a long moment.

"That the banker's daughter? The girl who wants you to move your store over

to New Chance?" Quayle asked him.

Lew grinned. "Yeah, that's Nora Travis. I reckon it's natural she should figure like her pa does. Besides, Wilkins is after her. He promises all sorts of new-fangled things over there a girl'd like. Shops—he calls 'em—and a opera house and social doings when the moneyed people come in. I don't blame Nora, even if she can't see me for what she calls my mental cobwebs. I don't look at it that way, Mr. Quayle. I don't figure a man ought to desert his old home any more than his old friends."

"I'm inclined to agree with you, Lew. Mebbe I'd like to team up for a spell with your kind of muleheaded jigger. How'd you like to pin Rod Wilkins' ears back and make the banker swallow his Adam's apple and take some starch outta that pretty girl?"

"Why, I reckon it'd be worth at least my left arm, Mr. Quayle. Are you serious?"

"Never more so. The survey's by-passed Shawville, that true enough, but the railroad hasn't. Not yet, anyhow. To be honest, it looks bad for you, Lew. This sink you call Boone Basin'd be a headache to a railroad construction engineer. It'd be easier and cheaper to stay up on the plateau, where Wilkins is developing his Buckle Flats."

Lew nodded ruefully. "I know."

Quayle grinned quickly. "But look. Build enough business down here, and the railroad won't balk at the extra expense. They'd really rather tap a going settlement than a paper one. I take it the only thing against the basin is the winter floods and the summer droughts, which're discouraging settlers."

"That's right. Otherwise we could make Buckle Flats look silly."

"Let's try it."

"You really mean we might, Mr. Quayle? I've sure heard plenty about you pulling off jobs everybody says're impossible, but—"

"There's a long stretch between what most folks call impossible and what really is, Lew. The West was built by muleheads doing the impossible. All we gotta do is corral them winter floods for us summers. Any others in the basin who feel like you do about it?"

"Plenty."

"Could you get them together for a meeting?"

"I sure could. When?"

"Thursday night. I'll leave the details up to you. Just have them together somewhere, ready to listen."

"They'll be there."

QUAYLE spent the next two days inspecting Boone Basin closely, and he liked what he saw. Ten miles long and about half that wide, it was skirted on the west by the rugged Tenino mountains, which were snow-capped even this late in the summer. On the east was an endless stretch of high rimrock, the terminus of the broad plateau called Buckle Flats.

What interested Matt Quayle was that hint of snow in the Teninos. Boone River came down from there, now nearly a dry bed, showing glaring marks of violent winter scouring and flooding. Brush-choked and twisting, it was the type of watercourse that went wild in flood stages only to peter out completely when it might be of some use. The idea in Matt Quayle's mind was not of his own creation. Ingenious men in many places had already learned how to reverse the nature of a river like this. If Boone Basin would back him, he could do it here, though it would be an undertaking certain citizens on Buckle Flats was not going to like in the least.

* * *

Matt Quayle knew that his reputation for doing the fabulous was farflung, and he planned to trade on it here. On the afternoon of the third day he entered Ingram Travis' brick-fronted bank on the main street of Shawville.

"I've got thirty-thousand in folding money in my belt," he told the surprised banker. "I'd deposit it here except for one thing. I hear you're thinking of moving over to New Chance. I don't care to do business with anybody who doesn't plan to stay and grow with Shawville."

Travis was a lean man with iron-gray hair and much the same cast to his cold face. "Why, I heard you were paying us a visit. You mean you're undertaking some development in Boone Basin?"

"I sure am, and I don't mean to use a New Chance bank. Do you want my business?"

The fact that Ingram Travis did not get business of this magnitude every day showed in his glimmering eyes. "I've made no actual plans for moving away, Mr.

Quayle. But I don't understand you. We've lost the railroad. It looks hopeless here. After all, I'm a business man—as you are. If you're thinking of entering the land development field, I'd expect you'd want to be on the railroad."

"It takes more than rails and trains clattering past to make a prosperous community, Travis. It takes resources and enterprise and something a little above that."

"What do you mean?"

"Faith, sir. In your community—your home. Are you ready to accept my initial deposit?"

"Why—why, yes."

Quayle left the bank with mingled feelings. He had nailed the bank in Shawville at least for as long as it took to determine what was coming and its degree of success. That would have a good effect on community morale. On the other hand he had committed every cent of the profits he had made down on the Pleasant Valley road job, just completed, to a project that had received only a hasty preliminary study. Yet his heart was in it, prejudiced heavily by the ruthless beating he had seen Rod Wilkins attempt to give young Lew Shaw.

When he addressed the gathering of oldtimers in the town school house that evening, Quayle noted that Ingram Travis was in the audience, occupying a rear seat, his seamy face and ruled mouth grimly expressionless. He worked again to capture their minds before he advanced his proposition.

"Banker Travis, back there, can tell you I put up thirty thousand in earnest money in his bank; this afternoon. I reckon Lew Shaw told you I need your help when he asked you to come here. More than that, I'm going to ask you to put up money—big money. And my only bond is what you might've heard about me. How much would it be worth to you to take the railroad away from New Chance, to give Boone Basin a big place in this country's future? I'll give you my proposal, and you can figure your answer in line with that."

He had already drawn a rough map of the basin on the blackboard, and now he picked up a pointer. "I'm not surprising you folks when I tell you your trouble comes from snow water from the Teninos. They don't have enough vegetation to hold much moisture, and when the warm rains

and winds hit in the spring you get a crop of hellers in the river and its tributaries. The remedy is simple. Drive a cork in Boone River, where it comes out of the mountains. The canyons'll make a fine natural reservoir. Then you can have plenty of water in the channel all summer."

"What good'll that do?" a voice called.

"It'll water your stock, for one thing. But we can go on from there. You farmers can put in irrigation laterals. You're got a natural setup here that can make Buckle Flats look like a shriveled up strip of fried bacon."

"How much'll it cost?"

"I can give you only an estimate. Mebbe forty-fifty thousand for the big dam and flood-gates, canyon clearing and all that. More if you want to make it an irrigation project, as well. Naturally, I want a reasonable profit for myself. I'm suggesting you organize a water company I can make a contract with. Lew Shaw looks to me like the boy to run it. If we're going to influence the railroad, we've got to get some work in. We've got to have something definite to offer the settlers to get the basin filling up again. In other words, we've got to complete the dam before next spring and trap this winter's snowpack. I can do what I say, and it's up to you to decide if you want me to."

"What do you think, Mr. Travis?" somebody asked loudly.

The banker climbed to his feet, and Quayle did not like the look on his face. "It's preposterous! This man is asking you to put up fifty thousand dollars for no tangible return to yourselves, beyond water. You can put down a lot of wells for that." He sat down abruptly, scowling.

Matt Quayle had rather expected it. There was certainly none of the insight and daring in Ingram Travis that was building this West into a tremendously valuable segment of the nation. Yet, being a banker, his judgment would weigh heavily with these people. The silence following his words showed plainly that they were having an adverse influence.

Quayle gave his rebuttal with terse candor. "That all depends on what you call return, Mr. Travis. Your property could easily be worth twice what it is now in another ten years. I can't guarantee it. You'll just have to look at what is hap-

pening elsewhere, and what will happen if you fail to take action, and make up your own minds. If any of you are interested, I suggest that you remain. The rest of you are free to go."

Lew Shaw and three others kept their seats. Embarrassed for his community, Lew introduced the others. "Claude Gillette, Stan Choate and Eph Palmers, Mr. Quayle." The contractor shook hands. They were all oldsters, weather worn, work leaped and tough. "These were my dad's closest friends."

"And ready to bet our bank rolls on the basin, Quayle!" Choate snapped.

"How much can you put up?"

"We was talking it over in the corner, a bit ago. Between us, we can put up your fifty thousand."

A warm feeling rushed through Quayle. These were men after his own heart, believing in their community, ready to back it.

"And there's the money I inherited from Dad," Shaw put in. "You can put me down for another seven thousand."

"Get your equipment in here, Quayle," Gillette admonished. "We'll have your money in the bank when you're ready to draw on it."

CHAPTER TWO

River Riddles

YET during the next few days there was considerable uncertainty in Matt Quayle. It was not a lessening of confidence in himself. He felt that it was grossly unfair to these four to finance a thing that undoubtedly would benefit every man in the basin, even if they did charge for water and in time retire their investment. And there was something more.

"Rod Wilkins'll fight this with every dirty trick in the book," he warned them. "It could be that he can wreck us."

"All the more reason for going ahead," old Eph Palmers snorted. "We've met up with his breed before."

They were determined, now that he had offered a way to relieve the worry and despair so long gnawing in their minds, so Quayle decided to go on, risking his own money with theirs, if it came to that. He sent freighters on the long trek to Pleasant Valley, where he had his equipment stored,

and he got the other necessary but time-consuming preliminary details off his hands.

Meanwhile Lew Shaw was busy. When an itinerant sign painter chanced through town, Shaw hired him to paint a big sign on the side of his store building that out-trumpeted New Chance's, offering the basin's newfound and valuable asset—the promise of irrigation.

Within the month ground was broken at the site of the new Boone River dam. The design of the structure was simple. Quayle planned only a rock-and-earth fill with the flood gates to be constructed of timbers. Blasting operations soon filled the dry river bed, and teams and fresno scrapers were at work shaping it into a foundation. The dam would climb and be anchored to the rearing canyon walls which would form a reservoir behind it. He had an axe crew clearing the sparse jack pine and undergrowth well back up the canyon to prevent future debris from fouling the controls yet to come.

Rod Wilkins' answer to the menacing development in Shawville came when it thus grew evident that it was real. Quayle was in the Cartwheel saloon in Shawville, one evening, drinking alone at the bar, aware only of pleasant conversation droning from the gaming tables and the sweep of early winter rain against the front windows. Then two strangers brushed roughly through the batwings.

They were rain-soaked and unshaven, an ugly-eyed pair, and both looked drunk. As they strode up to the bar, one of them gave Quayle a hard, searching glance, then they took place at the bar, a little to his left. Not understanding the look of appraisal, Quayle tossed off his drink and forgot them. Then suddenly the more distant one let out an angry growl.

"Damn your hide, Jebson, you're a stinkin' coyote! If you've got half the guts you claim, you can fill your blasted hand!"

The man called Jebson tensed, taking a fast backward step, and Matt Quayle felt a warning shoot through him and automatically dropped flat on the floor. A split second later Jebson's partner's gun blasted, and lead whistled above Quayle's head. The contractor rolled over, jerking out his own gun and earing back the hammer, fury icing his eyes. Jebson had pitched himself aside, so that the other had fired at the exact spot where Quayle had stood a

second before. The whole incident had been rigged.

"Not good enough!" Quayle roared, and his gun barked. The gunman, trying to fire at him again, openly now, jerked and slid against the bar to the floor. Jebson made no effort to draw his own gun, standing back and staring, a mixture of fear and defiance in his eyes. Climbing to his feet, Quayle plucked his gun, then slapped him hard across the cheek. "You're friend ain't too bad hurt. Take him and get! And tell Rod Wilkins he'll have to think up a better one!"

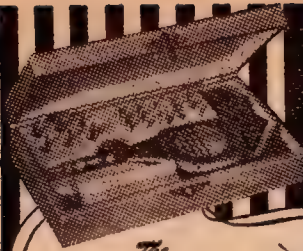
Jebson helped the other man to his feet, and the pair strode toward the batwings, dropping the drunken pretense in their haste. When they had disappeared an uneasy voice breathed inside him.

"Pretty close, Quayle! You better watch yourself from here on!"

Quayle was aware of the fact. In the days that followed a new anxiety grew in him. He had been on guard against sabotage and obstructive tactics, but he hadn't expected anything as serious as attempted murder. He worried less for himself than for the four who had backed him. On the one hand, it was likely that attempts would be made to encourage them to withdraw their support, or if Matt Quayle were to die with the project half completed they would stand to lose considerable money.

The murderous attack had an instant after-effect. For his initial grading, Quayle had employed local teams and teamsters and when word of the incident spread around they began to quit. The movement snowballed, and within a week Quayle, with a bitter twist to his lips, was forced to send for help from outside the basin that was to benefit by his labors.

The first heavy rain brought water down the river, and with a second and third there was enough to bring down logs from high in the Teninos, and ponds began to build behind the growing earth block. Anticipating this, Quayle had already sent down to a Stowe City employment agency for carpenters and more common laborers, and they began to arrive by stage. Now Quayle established a tent-housed camp for them and ordered as many more men as the agency could supply.



Your Best
**CHRISTMAS
BUY**

The
**BURGESS
vibra-tool**

Made in U.S.A. Pat. Off.

Man or woman . . . boy or girl . . . anyone can use this remarkable tool instantly! Great for craft workers! Needed in every home workshop. Deluxe Kit illustrated contains tool, 22 accessories and sharpening stone in handsome, hinged, polished wooden box, complete for only \$16.50.
60 cycles AC; 110 V.
See your dealer or order direct.

**Tools
leather**

**Engraves
Jewelry**

**Decorates
Glass**

**Carves
on Wood**

The Vibra-Tool alone with engraving needle for only **\$7.50**

HANDICRAFT DIVISION

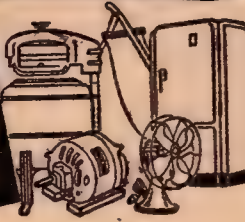
BURGESS BATTERY COMPANY

190 N. Wabash Ave.
Chicago 1, Illinois



**HERE'S A NEW AND
VITAL BUSINESS!**

**LEARN
ELECTRICAL
APPLIANCE
REPAIRING**



Offers Big Money - Independence

If you are mechanically inclined—can hold and use tools it will pay you to learn electrical appliance repairing. Operate from your garage, basement, etc. Work as many hours as you wish—the appliance repairman is his own boss. On many types of repairs it is usual for a repairman to charge on the basis of \$5.00 to \$6.00 an hour.

No Previous Experience Needed

Profusely illustrated our new course shows you in simple, easy to understand language plus drawings and photographs, how to make each repair on refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, washing machines, motors, fans, irons, etc., etc. Explains and gives you a working knowledge of electricity, welding, nickel plating, etc. Shows you how to build the power tools you need and how to solicit and keep business coming to you. Not a theory course but an honest to goodness practical course written by and used by repairmen the country over. Price of course is so low that the savings on your household appliances will pay for it. Act now! Send today for FREE literature. Christy Supply Co., 2835 N. Central Ave., Dept. D-1818, Chicago 34, Illinois

BOSS OF DAMNATION DAM

Even when the weather turned bad, the basin had an air of enterprise with so many laborers coming in and so many freighters on the road bringing in additional equipment, provisions for the crews and provender for the imported teams. Progress kept apace, and by late October the earth pile stopping the river was beginning to take neat shape and the timber work was roughly outlined. Then came the first snow, turning the Teninos white, and Matt Quayle experienced a sense of satisfaction.

It was the heart of this huge, daring and almost lone undertaking, the winter snowpack that would hold water there until spring and which, melting then, would fill the new reservoir formed by the dam and abutting canyons instead of flooding the basin erosively, and furnish water through the long, hot summers.

Quayle kept the site under guard, and so far as he knew no attempt had been made to damage the construction work. This did not ease him. Sabotage, if it did, would come with the work far enough along for the damage to be felt. And other things happened frequently, mere annoyances at first but growing into a definite and plaguing pattern. Freight wagons making the long and muddy haul from Stowe City were being harassed continually, the drivers bullied by horsebackers they encountered on the trail. Two loads of badly needed scrapers disappeared completely, and Quayle suspected that these particular drivers had succumbed to bribery. Men from the camp frequently ran into trouble at night.

Yet Quayle's big worry was the dam, which was still a long way from completion at the turn of the year, and he counted the days until mid-March or early April, when the snowpack would start to melt from the spring sun and warming winds, and water would come growling and grinding down the twisting canyons. He had to be ready for this, or it would all go out in a big wash.

THERE came a night when terror rode the basin, organized and on an undreamed-of scale. A party of half a dozen night riders hit the Boone River sit at a time when Quayle happened to be staying over night there, streaking in across the

NOW AMAZINGLY SMALLER!



NEW
Beltone
MONO-PAC
HEARING AID

THIS IS ALL
YOU WEAR



About 1/2 Size and Weight of
Old-Style Hearing Aids

ONE TINY UNIT does it all!

More people wear the Beltone Mono-Pac than all other one unit hearing aids combined. Learn WHY . . . and get startling new facts on deafness in fascinating FREE booklet. How deafness "creeps up on you"—how it can be overcome—and how this remarkable new Bel-tone Hearing Aid has helped thousands to hear again.

*Learn Why There Are More
Beltone Mono-Pacs in Use Than
All Other One-Unit Hearing
Aids Combined*

Mail Coupon—FREE Book on Deafness

Beltone Hearing Aid Co.
Beltone Building, Dept. MG-11
1450 W. 19th Street, Chicago 8, Ill.

Please rush FREE booklet containing the facts about deafness and what can be done to overcome it.

Name

Address

Town..... Zone... State.....

THE SENSATIONAL NEW All-Time PEN WRITES 3 YEARS

without refilling

- Writes fine, medium, heavy
- Ink dries instantly
- Writes on any surface—
paper, wood, textiles,
etc.
- Makes 6 to 8
carbons
- 5¾" long

**SEND NO MONEY
MAIL COUPON**



Positive Pressure Feed

Here is the smoothest
gliding pen you have
ever written with. The
secret lies in the patented
development of a tiny ball-
bearing point which rolls
ink evenly on any surface
MONEY BACK GUARANTEE.

Ball Point Pen Company, 737 W. Randolph St., Dept. PP-12,
Chicago 6, Ill.
Please send new Ball Point Pen that writes 3 years without re-
filling. I will pay Postman \$8.95 plus postage. Indicate color
desired ☐ Blue ☐ Black ☐ Green. My money will be refunded if
I am not fully satisfied. ☐ I enclose \$6.95. You pay postage.
Name.....
Address.....
City.....

STAMMER?

This new 128-page book, "Stammering, Its Cause and
Correction," describes the Bogue Unit Method for
scientific correction of stammering and stuttering—
successful for 45 years.
Benj. N. Bogue, Dept. 2985, Circle Tower, Indianapolis 4, Ind.

**GET THIS
FREE
BOOK!**

How to MAKE MONEY by MAIL

Easy way to start new or expand
present work; opportunity success
operating plan, no money needed. Sure-fire
profits; astonishing full particulars free.



HOWARD HOUSE

Melrose, 76-6, Massachusetts

Look! Servicemen-Civilians too!

**PRECISION
BUILT**

MILITARY WRIST WATCH



The watch you've been waiting for!
Swiss Movement
Precision made by
Expert Swiss Craftsmen

**SUPPLY LIMITED
RUSH YOUR ORDER**

A fortunate purchase makes
this amazing offer possible.
Latest military styling, red
sweep second hand. Easy to
read Extra Fancy Dial. Comes
complete with Leather Strap.
A watch you'll be proud to
wear or give as a gift. Below
O.P.A. Price.

—IMMEDIATE DELIVERY—

ONLY \$8.49
plus 10% Fed. Tax

SEND NO MONEY.—Pay Postman \$8.49
plus 85¢ Fed. Tax and few cents postal
charges, or, send \$9.34 with order and we
pay postage. Return within 10 days if not
delighted for refund providing watch has
not been tampered with.

Hurry—Order Now—Supply Limited!

ORDER WITH CONFIDENCE FROM

AMERICAN MERCHANDISING CO., INC.

Dept. PP-W 12 Adams Ave. Montgomery 4, Ala.

flats, cutting through the camp with blazing
sixguns. Like demons from hell, they struck
and were gone again. Lanterns were
lighted, and men piled into the camp street,
but the damage was done. A teamster
had died in his sleep, and two others were
wounded. Cold with rage, Quayle under-
stood it. They meant to drive off his im-
ported labor, as they had frightened off the
local supply.

The next morning he took the road that
ran eastward across the basin, then wormed
up atop the long escarpment. It was his
first trip onto the much advertised Buckle
Flats, but he was not surprised at the
monotonous sweep of bare land growing
only sage and rabbit brush and chemiso.

New Chance, when he reached it, had
the look of newness, three or four blocks
of unpainted buildings in the middle of the
vast flats. There was a numb feeling in
Quayle as he rode into town and racked
his horse before the one painted building,
occupied by the Wilkins Land Company.
He understood the danger to himself. Wil-
kins would know that some response would
come from last night's deviltry and would
be prepared for any eventuality. Quayle
swung to ground lightly, fire in him now
but calmness over that. He removed his
slicker and lashed it to the saddle. He took
off his big hat and beat the rainwater from
the brim, a big man with weathered, wet
cheeks. He noted the deserted street, the
vast quiet, then turned and moved across
the sidewalk.

The front window was curtained head
high, and Quayle received a shock of sur-
prise as he entered the office, for Rod
Wilkins was there and alone. The con-
tractor met the man's gaze with chilled
eyes. "Where's your bodyguard?"

"I'm alone, Quayle, and unarmed. If
you're looking for a fight, you won't find
it here."

"I knew the color of your back, Wilkins.
I don't relish the smell of gunsmoke, but
I came to warn you that if you pull one
more trick against me, I'm coming with
enough help to wipe you out."

Wilkins had the audacity to grin. "Too
late for it to do you any good, friend. I'm
really glad you came over. I got a letter
this morning, when the boys brought the
mail over from Shawville, that you'll be

BOSS OF DAMNATION DAM

interested in. It's from a friend of mine in Plattsburgh, where the Stowe City & Southern main offices are located, in case you don't know. You're licked, Quayle. The SC&S is calling for bids on the Myrtle Creek-Harlow section. Somewhat ahead of schedule. I don't need to point out to an engineer like you that it'll commit them to construction well past the head of Horse Canyon, where they'd have to turn to hit Shawville. So, my friend, regardless of your irrigation stunt, it's too late for it to get you a railroad!"

Quayle's features did not show the dismay running through him. There would be no reason for Wilkins to lie about it. As if to back his statement, the man picked up a letter on his desk and offered it.

When Quayle shook his head, Wilkins dropped it, still smiling in triumph. "It's something neither of us expected. The SC&S has been taking its time about building this spur, but it seems a party of engineers from the Veletz-Western was in this vicinity a while back. Looks like they might have an idea of building up from the south. Anyhow, it's made the SC&S get the lead out, and ruined you to boot, my cocky friend."

"Could be," Quayle admitted. He was too stunned to feel anything about it yet, but anger at Wilkins' triumphant leer crowded him. "You'll still got to settle with me for the men killed last night, Wilkins. Watch for it." He turned his back and strode out.

Reaction came as he rode back across Buckle Flats. The development had been entirely unpredictable. As Wilkins had remarked, railroads were inclined to take their time about new construction until a rival showed interest in the same territory. The Veletz-Western reconnaissance party could have had no greater aim than to throw a scare into the SC&S, but the latter line would have to hedge against the possibility of competition. In any event, the damage was irreparable, for once the SC&S had contracted past Horse Canyon there would be no changing its mind about the basin below.

Quayle reached Shawville feeling that the only thing left was a dash to Stowe City and a desperate effort to persuade them to change now on the basis of the



Become an Expert Accountant

The Profession That Pays

The demand for skilled accountants—men who really know their business—is increasing. National and state legislation is requiring of businesses—both big and small—much more in matters relating to Auditing, Cost Accounting, Business Law, Organization, Management, Finance. Men who prove their qualifications in this important field are promoted to responsible executive positions—given an opportunity to earn real salaries. The range is from \$3,000 to \$10,000 a year, even to higher income figures.

Send for Free Book—

"Accountancy, the Profession That Pays"

Why let the other fellow walk away with the better job, when right in your own home you may equip yourself for a splendid future in this profitable, growing profession?

Knowledge of bookkeeping unnecessary. Our free book on accountancy fully explains how we train you from ground up, or according to your individual needs. Low cost; easy terms.

The facts about the new LaSalle training in Accountancy and the opportunities in this highly profitable field are clearly outlined in a 48-page book which LaSalle will send you free.

The man in earnest to get ahead will find this coupon a most profitable aid to progress. If you have the urge and the will to increase your income, clip and mail the coupon NOW.

G. I. APPROVED

LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY

A CORRESPONDENCE INSTITUTION

Dept. 12334-HR 417 So. Dearborn St. Chicago 5

I would welcome details of opportunities in accounting, together with copy of "Accountancy, the Profession That Pays," without obligation.

☐ Higher Accountancy

Other LaSalle Opportunities: LaSalle opens the way to success in every important field of business. (Interested in one of the fields below, check and mail.

- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Modern Salesmanship
- ☐ Traffic Management
- ☐ Foremanship
- ☐ Industrial Management
- ☐ Stenotypy (Machine Shorthand)

- ☐ Law—Degree of LL.B.
- ☐ Commercial Law
- ☐ Modern Business Correspondence
- ☐ Expert Bookkeeping
- ☐ C.P.A. Coaching



Name

Present Position

Address

At Last! THE NEW ATOMIC LIGHTER and CIGARETTE CASE Combination



A masterpiece of modern design — streamlined chrome lighter top on handsome colored plastic case which holds full package of cigarettes.

\$2.50
complete

Rush your Order Today on this no-risk offer. You must be pleased or your money will be refunded in full.

WHOLESALE DISTRIBUTORS

4624 N. Sheridan Road, Chicago 40, Ill.

5 DAY TRIAL OFFER

WHOLESALE DISTRIBUTORS Dept. CC
4624 N. Sheridan Rd., Chicago 40, Illinois.
Please send me, at \$2.50 each, . . . combination lighter and cigarette cases as checked below.

☐ I enclose \$ (check, cash or money order) in full for postpaid delivery.

☐ Send C. O. D. I will pay charges plus postage.

Name

Address

City Zone State

LAW

STUDY AT HOME FOR PERSONAL SUCCESS AND LARGER EARNINGS. 38 years expert instruction — over 108,000 students enrolled. LL.B. Degree awarded. All texts furnished. Easy payments. Send for FREE BOOK—"Law and Executive Guidance"—NOW!

AMERICAN EXTENSION SCHOOL OF LAW
Dept. 72-B, 646 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill.

Learn To MOUNT BIRDS

TAN SKINS—MAKE UP FURS

Be a Taxidermist. We teach you at Home. Mount Birds, Animals, Pets, Heads, Fish. Save your hunting trophies. Decorate home and den. Make Money. Mount and tan for others. Fun and Profit! Don't delay. WRITE TODAY—NOW—for FREE BOOK with 100 game pictures. Hunters, get your copy—

It's Now Free. Send post card. State your Age. N.W. SCHOOL OF TAXIDERMY, Dept. 3369, Omaha, Neb.



RAISE CHINCHILLA RABBITS and NEW ZEALAND



FOR OUR MARKET

PROLIFIC—PROFITABLE

Catalog and Price List 104

—or send 25¢ for Book

"SUCCESSFUL RABBIT

RAISING", Price list & copy of Rabbit Magazine. Address

OUTDOOR ENTERPRISES, Box 15, PEARL RIVER, N.Y.

irrigation work accomplished and proposed. He dismissed the idea as futile. He spent a worried night, but when morning came he rose and went with his old jaunty tread. He breakfasted leisurely, then cut across the street to Lew Shaw's general merchandise store.

Shaw was reading a Stowe City newspaper that had come in on the early morning mail stage. He looked up with pained worried eyes as the famous engineer entered the room.

"So they've got a story on it?" Quayle asked lightly.

"What're we going to do, Matt?" Shaw inquired anxiously.

"Build our own railroad."

"Out of what?"

"Paper." Quayle grinned and lighted a stogie. "Lew, I reckon you're going to have to keep a eye on things at the dam for a spell. I'm surveying a railroad from here to Jason Junction."

"You're crazy. There ain't enough loose money in the basin to build thirty miles of railroad."

"We'll use buttons," the trouble-shooting engineer replied.

His mind made up, Quayle lost no time. He gleaned a crew from his camp, checked his dilapidated survey equipment, moved to the head of Horse Canyon and started a line south. He dared not let himself think too far into the implications of what he was doing, the neglect to the flood control work, the utter audacity of starting a railroad development by himself, the fact that his backers, like everybody else, were apt to consider him a complete crackpot and withdraw their support.

He made a location down the deep twists of Horse Canyon that surprised and gratified him. Then he crowded his crew southward, through Shawville and on across the basin, then up onto the high plateau again. He knew he was starting a wash of talk that ran in all directions. A furious snow-storm hit, up on top, but Quayle ignored it, promised bonus pay to his outfit, and kept going. At the end of two weeks he touched Jason Junction and returned to Shawville with a huge roll of profile paper in his grip. Then he forgot all about railroading, and devoted himself to his dam again.

BOSS OF DAMNATION DAM

CHAPTER THREE

Floodgates of Hell

NEARLY ten days passed before a man got off the late stage and sought out Matt Quayle at the hotel. He was Fred Oxford, special agent for the SC&S, a man Quayle knew well. In the big builder's room, Oxford canted a chair against the wall, blew pipe smoke in Quayle's direction and grinned.

"You smooth son, what're you cooking up?"

Quayle looked owlsh. "Just keeping busy, Fred."

"Who's behind you?"

"Nobody."

"It's the Veletz-Western."

"I said nobody, and I mean nobody. But I'll tell you this, Fred. I skinned better than three miles off your survey to Jason Junction. I got a better grade and better curvature. Enough to pay for the engineering into the basin and out again."

Oxford grinned and got up. "Well, I was just passing through, Matt."

"You were like hell."

Quayle found it difficult to conceal a grin as he went about his duties that day. But his suspense did not subside until a week later, when the Stowe City paper announced that the SC&S had modified its advertisement for bids on the new section. The terminus would now be the head of Horse Canyon.

"I made 'em hedge!" Quayle gloated to Lew Shaw. "They're not committing themselves past the canyon until they know for sure what sort of deal I'm cooking up."

"I'd like to see Rod Wilkins' face when he reads about it," Shaw commented.

That brought a frown to Quayle's face. "It means we'll hear from the jigger again."

There was hellish weather, the spring thaws were only six or eight weeks away, and there was still much to be done. Quayle spent his days on horseback, riding from one job to the next, watching, checking, untangling, crowding. The canyon walls that had been an advantage in the autumn were a handicap in midwinter. Blasting to bring down the badly needed dirt and rock had

MIDWEST RADIOS

at Greater-Than-Ever VALUES

**BIG, POWERFUL
WORLD-
RANGING
CHASSIS**

**with FM
(Frequency Modulation)
5 WAVE BANDS**



SERIES 16

**30
DAYS
TRIAL**

**SEPARATE CHASSIS or
COMPLETE CONSOLES AVAILABLE**

**The SYMPHONY GRAND
AM - FM
RADIO-PHONOGRAPH CONSOLE**



A magnificent radio and musical instrument that is completely new—from the ground up. Big, powerful Series 16 Chassis brings in long wave, short wave and FM

reception...an automatic record-changing phonograph...and scores of NEW Post-war features.

**SEND FOR
FREE
CATALOG**

BUY DIRECT FROM FACTORY and SAVE!

**FILL IN COUPON AND MAIL TODAY OR JUST
SEND YOUR NAME AND ADDRESS ON A POSTCARD**

**MIDWEST RADIO CORPORATION
Dept. 22-A, Cincinnati 2, Ohio**

Gentlemen: Please send me your new FREE Catalog and details of Your Liberal 30 Days' Trial!

NAME _____

STREET _____

CITY _____

ZONE _____ STATE _____

LEARN HOW TO WRITE GAGS!



**Be the Life of the Party!
MAKE MONEY! WIN
SUCCESS and FAME!**

BE A POPULAR GAG WRITER— now it's easy! No experience or special talent is needed. Al Garry, the famed writer for radio stars—Frank Sinatra, Abbott and Costello, Phil Baker and others—will show you how!

Ten Easy Lessons Teach You

Garry's 10-lesson course on **RADIO GAG WRITING** tells all: how to originate and develop gags; characterizing gags; gag switching; timely gags; developing gags from everyday incidents; script writing from gags, and many secrets you need to know for gag-writing success! **EXTRA:** you get 500 side-splitting, original gags—start your own gag file and rework these immediately for money! Don't delay fame, fortune, fun—**START NOW!** Complete, easy-to-learn **RADIO GAG WRITING COURSE** only \$3.95. **Send for it today!** **SATISFACTION, OR YOUR MONEY BACK!** Look this Course over for 7 days. If you're not 100% satisfied—if you don't put your friends in stitches with your new sparkling wit, return the Course and I'll refund your money. Send \$3.95 money order or check NOW—I'LL RUSH THE COURSE TO YOU POSTPAID AND GUARANTEED.

AL GARRY, Gagmaster, Dept. 5
IN THE HEART OF RADIOLAND
48 WEST 48TH STREET, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

FOOT RELIEF in 2 minutes!

DO THIS DAILY: Get wonderful quick relief and healthier feet with this exercise recommended by most Chiropodists (foot specialists). Bend feet under, flex from side to side, curl toes down, spread toes apart; repeat 10 times. Then massage feet, and between toes, with soothing Mennen QUINSANA fungicidal foot powder. Comforts, peeps up feet. Amazingly effective against Athlete's Foot, excessive perspiration, foot odor. Shake QUINSANA in shoes daily. Get QUINSANA now for greater foot comfort.

MENNEN QUINSANA

NEW CHEAP OIL BURNER
FOR COOKING & HEATING STOVES-FURNACES
HEAT YOUR HOME, COOK YOUR MEALS
WITH CHEAP FURNACE OIL



NO MORE SHOVELING COAL OR ASHES. A New Fuelizer Starter Vaporizing System turns Cheap, 130 Flash Furnace Oil, Distillate, Kerosene, etc. into Oil Gas heat without clogging up. **LIFETIME GUARANTEE** against defects. **\$1.00 Bonus Offer** for Testing. We will let you try it in your own stove or furnace for one month. Get yours for introducing. **Big Profits QUICK.** Be first. Send in your name **TODAY.**
NORTHWEST MFG. CO., 566-P 5th, Mitchell, So. Dakota

BUILDING HUMAN STATURE



"I grew 6 inches during a year I followed instructions" given in "BUILDING HUMAN STATURE," says the younger man at the left. "Now I am a head taller than my father."
If you wonder why you are short send for **FREE** outline of this remarkable book loaded with practical information.
CARILLON BOOKS
Dept. 73, Boerne, Tex.

AUTHENTIC WESTERN
SADDLE RING
FOR MEN & WOMEN
PURE STERLING SILVER



Only \$4.95
Postpaid We Pay Tax

First time at anywhere near this low price! Authentic replica of romantic western saddle. Handsomely formed from solid Sterling Silver by Navajo Indian craftsmen. Massive style for men, dainty style for women. A gift of distinction. A pleasure to wear. Sent on approval!

SEND NO MONEY! Just clip this ad and mail with your name and address. Pay postman only \$4.95 plus few cents postage on arrival; or send \$4.95 cash and we pay postage. Wear this sensational ring for 10 days. If not delighted, return for full refund.

Wrap around ring finger—where one touches is your ring size.

ARIZONA CRAFTSMEN

Room 617A, 1804 FARNAM
OMAHA 2, NEBR.

to be handled with utmost caution to prevent a ruinous landslide. Water rose behind the fill as fast as they could build it higher, and it became an relentless race against disaster.

On one of the rare clear days, Quayle switched attention from the steadily rising pool behind the dam to see a horse and buggy crawling up the muddy road across the river from him. It wheeled up at the other side of the fill, and Rod Wilkins swung to the ground. The big builder's jaw hinged a little when he saw that Nora Travis was with him. Quayle sauntered toward them.

Looking slightly abashed, Nora said, "I've been wanting to see this wonder work of yours, Mr. Quayle."

Quayle frowned at the derision. "Delighted, if you can get around the mud puddles." Wilkins said nothing, and Quayle turned and led them out onto the fill.

The girl turned and looked back at the broadening pool behind the dam with genuine interest. "Well! You have got some water here, haven't you?"

"Nothing like what we will have, when the run-off comes. Watch yourself. Rocks tumble down the walls once in a while without any warning. It makes blasting a ticklish proposition, and that's what's holding us up right now."

The girl was obviously impressed, though reluctantly so. "Well, seeing is believing. You're liable to make a convert out of me."

Wilkins shot her an ugly glance. "There's a big jump between theory and practice."

"Does this look like theory?" Quayle asked, indicating the rapidly filling lake, snaking back into the canyons.

Wilkins' face turned savage. "Let's get out of here!"

Nora cut him an annoyed glance. "You insisted on my coming with you, Rod. And I'm glad you did. Maybe this isn't such a fool idea, after all."

Quayle was grinning as he watched them leave. Lew Shaw's girl was losing a little of her cocksureness.

THERE began a week of steady rain, and Quayle had time for nothing beyond the minute by minute concerns of the Boone River project. He watched the

BOSS OF DAMNATION DAM

sodden canyon walls continually, and daily it grew more dangerous to blast to bring down the urgently needed filling material. As the warm rain took effect on the mountain snowpack, the water climbed dangerously on the dam. Much as he hated to release it, Quayle at last ordered the floodgates opened enough to halt the dangerous rise.

Late the following Friday afternoon the skies opened in a virtual cloudburst, and the effect of this was instantly noticeable. At noon on Saturday Quayle talked to Pres Lesky, chief powderman on the works.

"Looks like we've got to risk blasting. The gates can't draw it off fast enough, anymore. We've got to get dirt, and those damned walls are the only place to get it."

The powderman stroked a lean, unshaven jaw. "Then why don't we shoot?"

"Okay, let's shoot."

Quayle picked the site, staking out a dozen holes in a bulge half way up the cliff. It was a ticklish problem, for they had to bring down enough earth to finish the fill without upsetting the delicate balance and starting a general cave-in. Quayle admitted his apprehension, but he grinned at the powder monkey.

"Well, you know more about shooting it than I do. Have at it."

Lesky grinned. "I'll lay it on top the fill, graded, sloped and rip-rapped."

"Just get it down without bringing the rest of the Teninos."

Through Sunday morning Quayle hoped against hope that the weather would change abruptly, but it didn't. The spring run-off was on, probably two weeks earlier than usual. Such anomalies were familiar plagues to a construction man. "Let her go when you're set, Lesky," he told the powderman.

Lesky sent the "powder" cry ringing instantly. There had been no teams on the job since the weather had stopped the blasting, and now the hand laborers scrambled for cover. Lesky sank home the plunger of the blasting machine.

Earth lifted from the bulge, soundlessly and almost gently for a split second until the big ripping force came to fill the canyons with rocking sound. Quayle knew in the first seconds that something was wrong.



BE A CLERK all my life? NOT ME!!

Of course you say you won't.

But you may be unless you do something about it.

Hoping and wishing won't get you a better job and more money.

You must prepare for that step ahead—be ready to make promotion come.

We have helped thousands of ambitious men and women get ahead in the business world—perhaps we can help you.

At least you should investigate. It may be the turning point in your life to a better job and more money. So send the coupon without delay. Check the field of your choice and we'll send you without obligation the requirements and opportunities in that field.

G. I. APPROVED.

LASALLE Extension University A Correspondence Institution

417 S. Dearborn St., Dept. 12334-R Chicago 5, Ill.

I want to know whether you can help me get ahead in the field I have checked below. Send me your free 48-page booklet and full information about your home-study training in that field.

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Accounting | ☐ Business English |
| ☐ Bookkeeping | ☐ Effective Speaking |
| ☐ C.P.A. Coaching | ☐ Industrial Management |
| ☐ Law: LL.B degree | ☐ Executive Management |
| ☐ Salesmanship | ☐ Traffic Management |
| ☐ Stenotypy (Machine Shorthand) | ☐ Foremanship |

Name.....Age.....

Position.....

Address.....

City.....Zone.....State.....

Genuine Guaranteed SWISS POCKET WATCH



Dependable, new, handsome Watch. Accurate timekeeper. Modernistically styled. Fine quality. Precision built by Swiss craftsmen. Beautifully designed chrome case, with engraved back. Written Guarantee with every watch.

SEND NO MONEY
We'll do the Risk!

Satisfaction Guaranteed or Money Back. Pay postman C.O.D. only \$8.50 plus postage and 10% Federal tax. You'll be delighted!

International Diamond Co., 2435 Indiana Ave., Dept. 5151 Chicago 16, Ill.

'ROUND THE WORLD WITHOUT A PASSPORT . . .

When you feel the lure of far places—an urge to voyage across stormy seas to share the deeds of reckless men, from the African jungles to Arctic wastes, down the Amazon and back to our own great American West—if it's action you want, in the finest outdoor fiction, read . . . **Adventure**

Opportunity of Lifetime

Supplying DDT and other profitable products to farmers. No experience or capital required. Must have auto and good references. Permanent. Write or wire.

McNESS COMPANY

Dept. 716

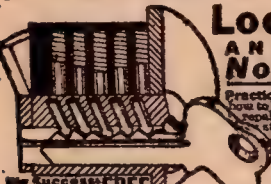
Freeport, Illinois

INVENTORS

Learn now—without obligation—how to protect and sell your invention. Secure "Patent Guide" Free. Write **CLARENCE A. O'BRIEN & HARVEY JACOBSON**
Registered Patent Attorneys

525-L Adams Building

Washington, D. C.



Locksmithing AND KEY MAKING Now Made Easy!

Practical up-to-date course teaches you how to pick locks, make keys, make master keys, repair, install, service, etc. New self-instruction lessons for every handyman, a homeowner, carpenter, mechanic, service station operator, fix-it shop, hardware dealer, gunsmith. 55 easy illustrated lessons. Low price! Satisfaction Guaranteed! Write:

Success is FREE!
NELSON CO., 1139 So. Wabash Ave., Dept. M05, Chicago 5, Ill.

Learn Profitable Profession in 90 days at Home



MEN AND WOMEN, 18 TO 50—Many Swedish Massage graduates make \$50, \$75 or even more per week. Larger full time incomes from doctors, hospitals, sanatoriums, clubs or private practice. Others make good money in spare time. You can win independence and prepare for future security by crafting at home and qualifying for Diploma. Anatomy Charts and 32-page Illustrated Book FREE—NOW! The College of Swedish Massage, Dept. 888, 100 E. Ohio St., Chicago 32.

STOP Scratching It May Cause Infection



Relieve itching caused by eczema, athlete's foot, pimples—other itching troubles. Use cooling, medicated **D.D.D. Prescription**. Greaseless, stainless. Calms itching fast. 35c trial bottle proves it—or money back. Ask your druggist for D. D. D. Prescription.

Mud, dry dirt and shattered rock mushroomed over the cliff bulge, concealing it, and instantly a great section of the cliff above peeled off and came tumbling down. A low murmur pinched up to an ominous rumble. Quayle saw dirt starting on the far wall, big slides building fast. A steep-talus ran out swiftly from the south bank, a similar one appearing on the north to cover the timber structuring completely. When it had all settled, the completed work was buried under forty feet of new earth. The timber work and controls were fouled so that it would take weeks to clear them.

Quayle whirled on Lesky in murderous rage. "You put enough powder in that to blow up a city! Damn you, you've had Rod Wilkins' dirty money in your palm!"

The powderman shrugged, a craftiness in his small eyes matching the defiant thrust of his chin. "You accusing me? Then to hell with you and your job." He turned and strode off toward camp.

Quayle let him go, for as certain as he was of the man's betrayal he had no proof. He had been obliged to trust Lesky, for no builder has time to master all the arts going into a big construction job. Now he smiled savagely. There was no question as to the ability of the reservoir to hold the water from the winter's snowpack. The difficulty was that it was plugged there permanently. The water company's finances would not stand the extra expense of clearing those fouled gates.

* * *

Behind locked doors in Lew Shaw's store that night Quayle laid his cards on the table with complete candor. "It's cost half again what I estimated, and you can cuss me out if you like. We've had to rush it, and the weather's been plain hell. But we'd have made it except for this rotten business. It'll be a headache clearing those gates, and unless I can get me another brain storm, we'll never cut it in time to sell water this summer. But the only way we can go is ahead. Can you boys scrape a few more splinters off the bottom of the barrel?"

The mournful faces around him held no hint of reproof, nor of encouragement. Claude Gillette grunted, "Scared I'm strapped, Matt," and the others nodded. Quayle searched his mind desperately and

BOSS OF DAMNATION DAM

hopelessly for a source of a private loan for himself to pull the project out.

"To hell with playing it safe!" Lew Shaw breathed. "Mebbe I can get a loan out of Ingram Travis if I give him a first mortgage on the store."

Quayle shook his head. "You men've risked enough. There's still idle money in the basin, which would be available now if that rock-faced banker hadn't splashed his cold water all around."

There was a rap on the store door. Shaw had many an after-hours customer, and he went with a frown to open it. His expression had changed to one of puzzlement when he returned a moment later, Ingram Travis and Nora following.

The banker's face was still expressionless when he made his announcement. "I heard about the trouble, of course, and—uh, handling your business, I know how your finances are."

"Don't come here to gloat!" Quayle snapped. "You're not risking a cent, so what business is it of yours?"

Travis showed then what would pass for

AUDELS Carpenters and Builders Guides 4 vols. \$6



Inside Trade Information for Carpenters, Builders, Joiners, Building Mechanics and all Woodworkers. These Guides give you the short-cut instructions that you want—including new methods, ideas, solutions, plans, systems and money saving suggestions. An easy preparative course for the apprentice and student. A practical daily helper and Quick Reference for the master worker. Carpenters everywhere are using these Guides as a Helping Hand to Easier Work, Better Work and Better Pay. To get this assistance for yourself, simply fill in and mail the FREE COUPON below.

Inside Trade Information On:

How to use the steel square—How to file and set saws—How to build furniture—How to use a mitre box—How to use the chalk line—How to use rules and scales—How to make joints—Carpenters arithmetic—Solving mensuration problems—Estimating strength of timbers—How to set girders and sills—How to frame houses and roofs—How to estimate costs—How to build houses, barns, garages, bungalows, etc.—How to read and draw plans—Drawing up specifications—How to excavate—How to use settings 12, 13 and 17 on the steel square—How to build hoists and scaffolds—skylights—How to build stairs—How to put on interior trim—How to hang doors—How to lath—lay floors—How to paint.



THEO. AUDEL & CO., 49 W. 23rd St., New York City

Mail Audels Carpenters and Builders Guides, 4 vols., on 7 days' free trial. If O.K. I will remit \$1 in 7 days, and \$1 monthly until \$6 is paid. Otherwise I will return them. No obligation unless I am satisfied.

Name.....

Address.....

Occupation.....

Reference..... PER

BIG MONEY and YOUR OWN BUSINESS

in LIQUID MARBLE!

FREE INFORMATION ON THREE BIG NEW MONEY-MAKING OPPORTUNITIES

Regardless of your age, sex, previous experience, and whether you are an ex-serviceman or not, we will send you astonishing free facts about the unlimited possibilities—in your own business—with amazing LIQUID MARBLE and our other marvelous new products. To secure this information, absolutely free, fill in coupon below or send a letter or postcard. No salesman will call on you now or ever. Write TODAY! Offer limited.

- LIQUID MARBLE.** Make beautiful artificial Marble Slabs. Pour from liquid state. Garbled or ungarbled. This marble may be mottled, veined, multi-colored or left in original snow-white state. The color is actually a part of the marble! Does not fade or wear away. LIQUID MARBLE is unsurpassed on kitchen or bathroom walls. Easy to make and install.
- PLASTIC FLOORING.** May be made in any color or combination of colors. Gives a lifetime of wear. Dustproof, Soundproof, Verminproof. Resilient to the tread. Lay out solid from wall to wall or in pattern design of various shaped blocks.
- FLEXIBLE MOLDS.** For plaster casting. Make your own molds for few cents each. \$1.00 in raw materials will make up to \$25.00 worth of finished goods. We furnish names of buyers.

Greatest Opportunities NOW!

With reconversion going ahead full speed, NOW is the time to line up your own money-making business. We offer you our BIG THREE money-making opportunities together with other equally profitable businesses. (See paragraph at right.) Get the FREE facts TODAY!

COMPO-TEX, Box 786-YH, St. Louis, Mo.

Send for
FREE
Details

FREE! EXTRA! If you write us promptly we will include free information about our other big money-making business. These include Compo-Tile Roofing and Caen Stone, Plastic Wood, Artificial Marble and Granite, Stone and Metal Solder, Plastic Tile Cement, Papier Maché, and many others.

FREE INFORMATION COUPON!

COMPO-TEX, Box 786-YH, St. Louis, Mo.

Please send me free details of your BIG THREE Money-Making Propositions including LIQUID MARBLE. Also include information about the additional new business possibilities given directly above.

Name

Street

City..... State.....

DON'T SUFFER FROM SKIN IRRITATION

due to ✓chafing from braces, trusses, girdles, corsets, etc. ✓bad sores ✓itching

NEW! Get wonderful new quick relief from skin irritation, itching, burning due to friction, rubbing, chafing—with amazing new Mennen **QUICOOL** powder! New scientific formula perfected by Mennen skin specialists—works fast, helps prevent and relieve chafing, bed sores, many externally-caused rashes. Wonderful too for baby's diaper rash, prickly heat, etc. Smooth on mild, soothing **QUICOOL** powder after bath also—refreshing, light scent. Get **QUICOOL** now for entire family. **GUARANTEE:** Double your money back if not satisfied.

QUICK! GET MENNEN QUICOOL

High School Course at Home

Many Finish in 2 Years

Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to resident school work—preparation for college entrance exams. Standard H.S. texts supplied. Diploma. Credit for H. S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry and socially. Don't be handicapped all your life. Be a High School graduate. Start your training now. Free Bulletin on request. No obligation.

American School, Dept. H949, Drexel at 86th, Chicago 27

INVENTORS

HAVE PATENT PROTECTION first. Remember, the details of your invention do not have to be 100% perfect before you can obtain patent. Patent laws favor the inventor who acts promptly. First step is to have us conduct search for the prior U. S. Patents and render a report as to your invention's patentability. Send at once for further particulars on how to protect your invention. Request does not obligate you.

MEMORROW, BERMAN & DAVIDSON

Registered Patent Attorneys

1804 Victor Building Washington 1, D. C.



TOOTHACHE?
DUE TO CAVITY

Get QUICK relief with Dent's Tooth Gum or Dent's Tooth Drops! "Cavity Toothache" frequently strikes at night. Be prepared. Buy either package from your drugist today. Keep it handy for children and adults. Follow easy directions.

DENT'S TOOTH GUM 25¢
TOOTH DROPS

Learn BAKING At Home

Baking is one of America's high industries in wages. Nearly depression-proof. Thorough basic home course lays sound foundation. If you have aptitude, write for **FREE BOOKLET**. "Opportunities in Commercial Baking."

National Baking School, 1318 Mich. Ave., Dept. 1420, Chicago 5



How To Relieve Bronchitis

Creomulsion relieves promptly because it goes right to the seat of the trouble to help loosen and expel germ laden phlegm, and aid nature to soothe and heal raw, tender inflamed bronchial mucous membranes. Tell your druggist to sell you a bottle of Creomulsion with the understanding you must like the way it quickly allays the cough or you are to have your money back.

CREOMULSION
for Coughs, Chest Colds, Bronchitis

a grin. "I'm far from worried about it. In fact, I want to put up the money you need to pull out. Maybe, Mr. Quayle, when I got right down to it, I found that element you mentioned—a man's faith in his community."

It was like a bombshell, and the listeners stared at each other in sheer shock, while Nora Travis wore a smile of quiet triumph as she looked at Lew Shaw.

Travis' gravity was instantly restored. "Now for the bad news. Rod Wilkins is in town with half a dozen of his toughs. Over at the saloon. He meant to work on you four who have been backing Quayle to discourage your digging up more money. He had the poor judgment to intimate as much to me. I told him I myself was going to help the water company recover from the damage it is obvious he perpetrated. As you know, that will encourage dozens of others here in the basin to want to invest in it. It probably will mean, Mr. Quayle, that your next job will be building our irrigation laterals for us."

"Hurray!" Shaw breathed.

"But unfortunately, I'm afraid I've forced a showdown. Wilkins' outfit is half drunk, and he's in an ugly mood. The only thing left to him is a violent bid for control of the situation."

"It had better be now than later!" said Quayle, with satisfaction.

"Check over your shootin' irons, boys," Stan Choate grunted. "Then let's go over there for a drink."

Quayle shook his head. "It's kind of a personal issue between Wilkins and me. He's our snake, rather'n the gunhawks on his payroll. You boys come along, but just to see I don't get crossed up."

THE six men who paced down the street, a little later, moved in calm, deliberate strides. Their entrance into the Cartwheel sent a ripple of excitement through the crowd, which was followed by a tight hush, a discreet hunt for cover. Wilkins was nursing a drink at the bar, and it was evident that as he was holding his men in a close knot, his eyes bleak and dangerous, and they were grouped around him protectingly.

Studying the situation as he tramped the width of the room to the long mahog-

BOSS OF DAMNATION DAM

any bar, Quayle wondered if, in a corner, Wilkins would fight without the advantage of his hard-eyed crew. Around the man, slim hands innocent of the callouses of honest work and skilled in the lethal sort, hovered nervously close to cold steel gun grips.

Quayle made his words cold but insistent. "You're whipped, Wilkins. Get yourself and your mad dogs outta Shawville. Don't ever come back."

For a long moment the man eyed him, then Quayle saw the almost imperceptible tilt of the head that was a signal to the gunmen. Quayle sighed, dreading what he foresaw but resigning himself. Rod Wilkins' last chance was here before him, an opportunity to gun down the man upon whom depended the resurrection and completion of the menacing irrigation project that threatened New Chance.

The room was cleared now, except for the two contingents facing each other in grim silence. Shaw and his friends had fanned out behind Quayle, alert but careful not to touch it off themselves. Wilkins wet his lips with a snakelike movement of his tongue, then, like a well-oiled mechanism, his henchmen went into action.

Wilkins moved lightly aside, baring the man who had stood behind him and who, in this cover, had carefully unlimbered his sixgun. As the promoter whirled into the clear, this man was lifting and lining the gun, fingers and thumb moving. Quayle started at this point, and he shot the man square in the chest before he could finish earing back and triggering.

After that it was a fluid melee. Nonparticipants sprinted and crawled and rolled

Now for EVERY WORK SHOP! NEW Invention

Electroplates by BRUSH

**Easy to Plate CHROMIUM
GOLD, SILVER, NICKEL, COPPER
... For Pleasure and Profit!**

If you have a workshop—at home or in business—you need this new Warner Electroplate. At the stroke of an electrified brush, you can electroplate models and projects—you can replate worn articles, faucets, tools, fixtures, silverware, etc. with a durable, sparkling coat of metal... Gold, Silver, Chromium, Nickel, Copper or Cadmium. Method is easy, simple, quick. Everything furnished—equipment complete, ready for use. By doing a bit of work for others, your machine can pay for itself within a week. So make your shop complete by getting a Warner Electroplate right away. Send today for FREE SAMPLE and illustrated literature. ACT AT ONCE! Mail Coupon.

**WARNER ELECTRIC CO., DEPT. K-88
1512 Jarvis Avenue, Chicago 26, Ill.**

FREE Details & Sample!

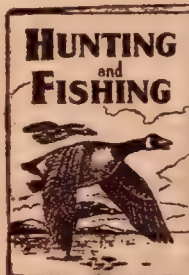
WARNER ELECTRIC CO., 1512 Jarvis Avenue, Chicago 26, Dept. K-88
Gentlemen: Send Free Sample and Details to:

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____



MAGAZINE, 250 Sportsman's Bldg., Boston, Mass.

HUNTING & FISHING

is a monthly magazine crammed full of hunting, fishing, camping, dog and boating stories and pictures, invaluable information about guns, fishing tackle, game law changes, best places to fish and hunt—countless ideas that will add more fun to your days afield.

Special Trial Offer

Send 25c in stamps or coin and we will send you **HUNTING & FISHING** for six months.

HUNTING & FISHING

Now

FARM IMPLEMENTS
SHOP WORK
HOME APPLIANCE
AUTOMOBILE REPAIRS

A DYNAMIC HEAVY DUTY INDUSTRIAL WELDER

IDEAL FOR AUTO - HOME APPLIANCE AND FARM REPAIRS

DESIGNED TO DO HIGH GRADE WELDING INEXPENSIVELY—Maintenance Men; Farmstead Mechanics; Machine Shops; Foundries; Auto, General Repair and Job Welding Shops; all using the DYNAMIC find it so indispensable and useful that they cannot afford to be without it. If inexperienced, you can easily learn to do a variety of high grade welding jobs by following the practical, simplified operating and welding instructions furnished. Once you see a DYNAMIC in operation, you won't want to be without it. Its simplicity will amaze you. In a year the DYNAMIC only costs you about 6c a day. Helmet, rods, cables, holder and operating instructions, etc., furnished.

SAVES YOU VALUABLE TIME AND MONEY!

This portable DYNAMIC WELDER—easily carried to the job—can be operated from any convenient, properly wired 110 volt, 60 cycle line. Can also be supplied for 220 volt, 60 cycle operation and for other voltages and cycles at slight additional cost. Works on IRON, STEEL, BRASS, BRONZE, AND OTHER METALS—has 8 metallic and carbon arc welding heat stages—does work you would think only possible with larger more expensive machine.

DYNAMIC WELDER CO. • 13 East 23rd St., NE, Chicago 16, Ill.

FOR ONLY

\$23.50

COMPLETE...

**AVAILABLE NOW
WITHOUT
PRIORITIES!**

WRITE TODAY FOR
LITERATURE

Get details on our
10 day trial offer.

Member Chicago
Association of
Contractors

VETS!



Only
\$1.98

HONORABLE DISCHARGE RING

HERE'S A VALUE! Handsome, hefty Genuine Sterling Silver HONORABLE DISCHARGE RING, yellow gold finish, for only \$1.98 plus tax. Beautiful Discharge Emblem on handsome scrolled mounting. A magnificent ring you'll wear for life.

SEND NO MONEY Mail your name, address, and ring size today. Your Genuine Sterling Gold Finish Discharge Ring will be sent to you AT ONCE. Pay your postman only \$1.98 plus tax and postage. Wear the ring 10 days, and if not delighted, return it and your money will be refunded at once. Yes, your satisfaction guaranteed! ORDER TODAY. Send strip of paper for size.

CHARLES STEWART, 616 Walnut St.
Dept. G-230, CINCINNATI 2, OHIO

Train Your Own HORSES!

Colts - Stock Horses - Circus Horses
Gait Show Horses - Write for FREE BOOK
ANIMAL LOVERS' ASSOCIATION
Box G-111, Tarzana, Calif.



MAN OR WOMAN WANTED—Full, or part time Rawleigh Route. No experience or capital necessary. Sales easy to make and profits large. Start immediately. Write Rawleigh Co., Dept. L-190-PBL, Freeport, Ill.

PATENTS

Write for full information on what steps an inventor should take to secure a Patent.

RANDOLPH & BEAVERS, 573 Columbia Bldg., Washington 1, D.C.

Are You Satisfied With YOUR NOSE?



Nobody today need go through life handicapped by a badly shaped nose, disfigured features or blemishes. IN YOUR NEW FACE IS YOUR FORTUNE, a famous Plastic Surgeon shows how simple corrections "re-model" the unbeautiful nose, take years off the prematurely aged face. Yours, postpaid, in plain wrapper - only 25c

FRANKLIN HOUSE, Publishers
629 Drexel Bldg., Phila., Pa. Dept. 4-T

toward the slightest cover. Wilkins' unruffled gun crew melted swiftly down room, spreading out and forting behind crashing tables and at the end of the bar. Behind Quayle a similar movement took place in lightning speed, with gun concussion rocking the acrid powdersmoke.

Quayle hunkered at the corner of the bar, wanting only one man beyond his sights. Wilkins had disappeared at the far end and moved in behind with the frightened bartender, and abruptly lead splintered the thin paneling within an inch of the builder's elbow. In the same instant Quayle saw Lew Shaw rise from behind an overturned table and drive two quick shots down the room. With a light movement for so big a man, Quayle lifted himself, right hand on the bar, springing legs driving him to a sitting position on top. Wilkins sent another slug tearing through the bar panel, not expecting this. Pivoting on his haunches, Quayle went on over.

Wilkins had no alternative then but to face it. Raising to his knees, grinning now in resignation, he tried to aim and fire. Then abruptly he was frozen there, a hole appearing on the bridge of his nose, blood streaming, and finally he was rocking forward onto his face as a savage worships a pagan shrine.

Bent double, Quayle slipped down to the open bar end and there he caught sight of three unsuspecting gunmen and could see the others sprawled lifelessly. He had drilled two of them before the other realized the sudden menace and bellied around to face him. On the other side of the room a gun spoke sharply, and it was over. Quayle rose with a sigh, and with relief counted his friends. Shaw and Gillette bloody, but all of them able to come to their feet.

* * *

The evening of the second day after that Matt Quayle rode into Shawville from the Boone River project in danger of urging his saddle forward onto the horse's neck. He hit the sidewalk in front of Shaw's mercantile, paced across it and into the store in eager strides, then clawed at his big hat. Nora Travis was there by the dry goods counter. Lew stood across from her, beet-red, head bandaged, but looking happy.

BOSS OF DAMNATION DAM

"I've got that brainstorm!" Quayle's voice boomed. "I've rigged a kind of hydraulic giant below these fouled gates, and danged if it's not clearing them like a dog scrabbling there. Nora, honey, it sure looks like we can spend your pappy's money all on irrigation ditches."

"And I've got news for you, Matt Quayle!" a voice said.

The store door had opened and closed, and now Quayle turned to stare at the man who had entered. "Fred Oxford! When did you come to town?"

The Stowe City and Southern Railroad's special agent grinned. "Tonight's stage. I was over on the hotel porch, waiting for you. Followed you over here. Matt Quayle, you old sharper, that survey you ran down to Jason City was for no greater purpose than to throw a scare into my outfit and make us reconsider."

Quayle grinned. "Worked, didn't it?" "It sure did. And it'll work as a blamed good railroad location. I'm empowered to buy it from you, Matt. The company suddenly hankers to tap Boone Basin."

"Buy, hell!" Quayle returned. "Just name a whistle stop for me someplace, and it's all yours."

Lew Shaw had been fidgeting from one foot to the other; words obviously swelling in him. "I got some news for you, Matt," he cut in now. "Nora just promised to become my wife on the day we dedicate the dam."

Quayle nodded brightly. "That's not exactly news, Lew," he said, with an inner sigh that such luck had passed him up. "But it's sure just as welcome."

THE END



CAN YOU FIX IT?

These wonder books tell step by step HOW to make difficult repairs and adjustments, how to keep a car at maximum efficiency, including latest improvements in car design and operation. Engine troubles and how to correct them well covered.

SIX BIG VOLUMES
2800 pages, 2000 illustrations, wiring diagrams, etc., including Diesel Engines. Beautiful modernistic, washable cloth binding.

AUTO

BOOKS ON APPROVAL

SEND NO MONEY. Just mail the coupon for a complete set of Six Big Auto Books, 20th Edition. Whether you are a mechanic or helper, expert or apprentice, auto owner or driver, take immediate advantage of this FREE EXAMINATION OFFER.

MAKE GOOD MONEY NOW HOLD A PERMANENT JOB

America wants its automobiles kept in good repair. Men with "know how" are in demand, at big pay. These books will help you get and hold an important job, or give you a chance to go into business for yourself now or later. Any man who half tries to improve himself can learn auto servicing and repairing by this quick reference method. Use the JEEF INDEX to find easily understood answer to any auto problem. These wonder books prepared by eleven of America's great automobile engineers. Many hundreds of valuable illustrations. Send the coupon TODAY.

[A year's consulting privileges with our engineers now given with these books without extra charge.]

Vocational Publishers Since 1898

AMERICAN TECHNICAL SOCIETY, Dept. A931
Orexel Ave. at 58th St., Chicago 37, Ill.

I would like to examine your Six-Volume Set of Auto Books. I will pay the delivery charges only, but if I choose I may return them express collect. If after 10 days' use I prefer to keep them, I will send you \$2 and pay the balance at the rate of only \$3 a month until \$24.50 has been paid. Please include consulting service as offered above.

Name

Address

City State

Please attach letter stating age, occupation, employer's name and address, and name and address of at least one business man as reference. Men in service, also please give home address.

REFRIGERATION and AIR CONDITIONING

REFRIGERATION
TRAINING
Since 1927



MECHANICAL units everywhere need servicing. Soon new units will require installation service. You can be ready with reliable pay-knowledge of this big income field. Unique home study-plus actual practice plan prepares you to enter servicing or installing field or get into business of your own. Great opportunities now and later. Get facts FREE. Write today!

UTILITIES ENGINEERING INSTITUTE
Dept. L-10, 1314 W. Belden Av., Chicago 14, Ill.

Kidneys Must Remove Excess Acids

Help 15 Miles of Kidney Tubes Flush Out Poisonous Waste

If you have an excess of acids in your blood, your 15 miles of kidney tubes may be overworked. These tiny filters and tubes are working day and night to help Nature rid your system of excess acids and poisonous waste.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, head-

aches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Kidneys may need help the same as bowels, so ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, a stimulant diuretic, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. Doan's give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills.

Train for **SUCCESS** with **I.C.S.**

AIR CONDITIONING COURSES

Air Conditioning
Heating
Plumbing
Refrigeration
Steam Fitting

CHEMISTRY COURSES

Chemical Engineering
Chemistry, Analytical
Chemistry, Mfg. Iron and Steel
Petroleum Refining Operator's
Plastics Pulp and Paper Making

CIVIL ENGINEERING, ARCHITECTURAL AND MINING COURSES

Architecture
Architectural
Drawing
Bridge and
Building Foreman
Bridge Engineering
Building Estimating
Coal Mining
Contracting and
Building
Civil Engineering
Highway Dealer
Sanitary Engineering
Structural Drafting
Structural Engineering
Surveying and Mapping

ELECTRICAL COURSES

Electrical Drafting
Electrical Engineering
Electric Utilities
Lighting Technician
Practical Electrician
Power House
Electrician
Ship Electrician

AVIATION AND INTERNAL COMBUSTION ENGINES COURSES

Aircraft and
Engine Mechanic
Automobile
Aeronautical
Engineers Jr.
Gas Engines
Aviation
Commercial Pilot
Private Pilot
Diesel—Electric
Diesel Engines

MECHANICAL COURSES

Airplane Drafting
Foundry Work
Heat Treatment of Metals
Industrial Engineering
Inventing and Patenting
Machine Shop Practice
Mechanical Drafting
Mechanical Engineering
Mold-Loft Work
Patternmaking—Wood, Metal
Reading Shop Blueprints
Sheet Metal Drafting
Sheet Metal Worker
Ship Drafting
Shiplifting
Tool Designing
Weather Observing
Welding, Gas and Electric
Tool Making

TEXTILE COURSES

Cotton Mfg.
Rayon Weaving
Textile Designing
Woolen Mfg.

ACADEMIC COURSES

Arithmetic
Commercial
High School
Geometrical
Drawing
First Year College
High School
Higher
Mathematics
Illustrating

COMMUNICATIONS COURSES

Electronics
Practical
Telephony
Radio, General
Radio Operating
Radio Servicing
Telegraph
Engineering

RAILROAD COURSES

Air Brake
Diesel Locomotive
Locomotive Engineer
Locomotive Fireman
Railroad Rate Clerk
Railroad Section Foreman
Car Inspector

MARINE AND STEAM ENGINEERING COURSES

Hollermaking
Combustion
Engineering
Engine Running
Marine Engines
Navigation
Stationary
Firemen's
Steam Electric
Steam Engines

BUSINESS COURSES

Accounting
Advertising
Bookkeeping
Business Correspondence
Business Management
Certified Public Accounting
Commercial
Cost Accounting
Federal Tax Course
Foremanship
Motor Traffic Management
Postal Service
Salesmanship
Secretarial
Stenography
Traffic Management
Typist

LANGUAGE COURSES

French
Good English
Spanish

True for 55 years:

**TODAY'S I. C. S. STUDENT
IS TOMORROW'S LEADER!**

—and never truer than today

• *The Future belongs
to the Trained Men!*

**ACT NOW TO
JOIN THEM**

Thousands of America's business and industrial leaders
began their climb to success by mailing this coupon!

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
BOX 3278-W, SCRANTON 9, PENNA.

Please send me complete information on the following subjects:

(Write above the subject in which you are interested.)

Name _____ Age _____

Home Address _____

City _____ State _____

Employed by _____

Present Position _____ Working Hours _____ A.M. to _____ P.M.

Length of Service in World War II _____ Special tuition rates
to members of the Armed Forces. Enrollment under the G. I. Bill
of Rights approved for War II veterans.



THE H. D. LEE COMPANY, Inc.
 Kansas City, Mo.
 Minneapolis, Minn.
 Trenton, N. J.
 San Francisco, Calif.
 South Bend, Ind.
 Salina, Kansas

It's Lee 6 to 1

In a nationwide survey* among thousands of men doing all types of work, the question was asked... "What brand of overalls do you prefer?" Lee Jelt Denim Overalls led the next brand by a margin of 6 to 1.

Why is Lee the choice of common-sense, money-wise workingmen? Because they *know* bedrock work clothes value! They know Lee's exclusive fabrics wear longer and wash better. They know Lee "Tailored Sizes" mean perfect fit, lasting comfort and better appearance.

Buy Lee Work Clothes... at leading stores coast-to-coast.

There's a LEE for every Job!

JELT DENIM OVERALLS • UNION-ALLS
 MATCHED SHIRTS AND PANTS
 DUNGAREES • COWBOY PANTS

*Survey made by a prominent publishing company.

WORLD'S LARGEST MANUFACTURER OF UNION-MADE WORK CLOTHES



"Guess that's what he means by a wonderful arrangement!"

Looking for all-around whiskey agreeableness?

Light body... plus magnificent, perfected flavor?

Remember... Calvert has blended more fine whiskey in its time
than any other distiller in America.

Hence the tradition

... Clear Heads Choose Calvert

Calvert

BLENDING WHISKIES

Reserve OR Special

Calvert Distillers Corp., N.Y.C. BLENDED WHISKEY 86.8 Proof.

Calvert "Reserve"—65% Grain Neutral Spirits... Calvert "Special"—72% Grain Neutral Spirits